Colette

MITSOU

OR

HOW GIRLS GROW WISE

BY

COLETTE

TRANSLATED BY
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COLETTE

A PORTRAIT BY

JANET FLANNER

GABRIELLE COLETTE, the most read and important *femme des lettres* of France today, was born in 1873 in that part of Burgundy which produces small but heady wines. Her father was a fantastic Zouave officer who had lost a leg in the African campaigns and was finally rewarded as government tax-assessor in late life; her mother came from well-to-do land-holding people in the Ardennes. Colette's elementary education was gained in the sparse village school on which she richly drew for her famous Claudine series, written under the influence of her first husband, an amateur known as Maugis among the symbolist poets, as Willy among editors and town wits and as Henry Gauthiers-Villars by his aristocratic family and the admirers of his precious musical tastes. The Claudine books, consisting of four reminiscent volumes of youth written when she was

still uncritically young and opening with what amounted to a shrewd and shocking inquest on the manners and morals of pedagogue and pupil in provincial schools, caused a furore by their garrulous candor. They obtained for Colette an immediate *succès de scandale,* marked her first literary period and her decision to abandon it, and established her as a permanent Parisian personality.

In the less than thirty years of her subsequent literary life she has written almost forty books of which the novels CHÉRI, LA VAGABONDE and recently LA SECONDE are usually regarded by critics as her fictional *chefs-d'oeuvres,* and of which LES VRILLES DE LA VIGNE and LA NAISSANCE DU JOUR, appearing twenty years apart in her long list of great subjective works, have alone sufficed in their material and manner to rank her as one of the important stylists of her epoch. The subject matter of the other volumes, dealing with topics as varied as imaginary dialogues with animals (DIALOGUES DES BÊTES, together with LA PAIX CHEZ LES BÊTES commonly accepted as

modern French classics) music halls, Marcel Proust, memories of women in love (L'ENTRAVE) or women in life (LE BLÈ EN HERBE) all really deal, no matter what they relate, only with Colette. For the essence, the value of her talent, is local. In addition to her long list of books she has been collaborator on, among other prints, *Le Figaro*, *Comoedia* and *Le Matin*. She played the rôle of Lea when CHÉRI was on the stage of the Théâtre Daunou and that of the title character, in a cast with Paul Poiret, when LA VAGABONDE was produced at the Théâtre de l'Avenue. She has barnstormed through seasons in the provinces, was once a dancer and a mime in one of Maeterlinck's early productions. She draws, she composes music, she recently wrote a ballet for Maurice Ravel (L'ENFANT ET LES SORTILÈGES, produced at the Opéra-Comique) and is considered an artistic gourmet in a country where eating ranks as an art. As a child she wanted to be a sailor.

Since George Sand, Colette is the only dominant woman writer in France. She did not invent the modern French woman in

French literature, the older male writers having effected that. But to the invention Colette supplied the organs, the accuracies, the mind and the heart. In the excess of her revelation, no one has more hardily reconstructed women than Colette and no one is read more by women. She created a new dissociated female French type which has markedly influenced the psychology of the 20th century French novel. On women Colette has made observations so accurate as to rank as discoveries; her frankness passed for, then amounted to, genius. She was the first novelist writing about women to rank love not as a romantic but as a physical necessity. She remains the least philosophical, the most meticulously material of Parisian novelists. She writes only about visible life. As she says, she cares nothing about death, not even her own.

Colette's unexpectedly rich vocabulary and sensuous, nature-loving style which in a period of post-war literary slovenliness remain the grammarians' delight, demand appreciation, not comment, and are both incapable of imitation.

At present she lives on the Palais-Royal gardens in a small flat whose walls reflect her: a taste for color, for comfort, for ordered extravagance. Her felines, her Siamese cats, her wild cats and dogs form one of the eccentric traditions of Paris. Her concentration on them in life, in literature, in sentiment and simile, ranks her as the great prose *animalier* of her generation.

She is now a short, hearty-bodied woman with a crop of wood-colored hair, with long grey, luminous, painted, slanting eyes and a deep alto voice. After years of Parisian living, she still speaks French with a racy Burgundian accent. Her major passions are alternatingly her friends, food, companionship and solitude. She reads little. Her minor passions have been for lonely chill Brittany houses by the Atlantic and hot vineyard cottages by the Mediterranean. Her works have been translated into all the important world tongues, but in a polyglot Paris, Colette has remained unique, speaking and writing only her own special language.

JANET FLANNER

Paris, 1929.

MITSOU

OR

HOW GIRLS GROW WISE

I

May during the War.

The big spring Revue, "It's a Hit" is on at the *Empyreé-Montmartre.* The management have engaged eighteen girls for its production, an undersized consumptive comedian, who is also to be master of ceremonies, and an aged tragedian for the indispensable parts of "Père la Victoire," "The Grenadier of Raffet," and "General Joffre."

The dressing room of Mademoiselle Mitsou, star. Wall paper in imitation of pink and white toile de Jouy. (It had been pink and white once, but that was before Mitsou's day.) A board covered with bath towels serves as a table; beside it stands a cheap wash basin, pitcher and slop pail. Cardboard boxes hold the face powder. A magnificent diamond ring lies among eyebrow pencils and rouge pots. A small couch, no softer than a park bench, and two enamel-painted caned chairs complete the furnishings. General atmosphere of "It's-plenty-good-enough."

The intermission. Mitsou is alone, resting, dressed in strawberry-colored stockings, sewn at the hem to her tights, gold slippers and a mauve crepe kimono. Nature has bestowed upon Mitsou the kind of beauty required by the fashion of the day: she has no nose—or almost none—very large eyes, black as her hair, rounded cheeks, and a small pouting mouth. So much for her face. Her body is also as it should be, with long well-shaped legs and little low breasts. All this she possesses with no other blemish

than a slight thinness above the knees. Six or seven more years, however, will fill out her boyish thighs, and her lean nymph's back; she is only twenty-four years old.

Mitsou is sitting at her make-up table. Her two legs, opened in the shape of a V, are held rigid for fear of damaging the stockings at the knees; but her young back curves and her neck is stretched out like that of a thirsty gazelle. Mitsou is so still that she would scarcely appear alive if she did not, from time to time, powder her cheeks, brighten her lips with rouge, or accentuate the corners of her eyes with a pencil. The diligent hand moves without a thought, and without thought, too, are her large, dark, clear eyes and her sad, serene young face.

Sounds of limping steps in the corridor. The bony old finger of Boudou, the call boy, knocks on the door.

BOUDOU, *opening the door. (He is seventy-two and looks much older.)*: "End of intermission. You're next, Mademoiselle Mitsou."

MITSOU, *slowly rousing herself:* "Thank's Boudou. Is your foot better?"

BOUDOU: "Not much better. If there's no improvement by Thursday, I'll wash it and put on a wool and a cotton sock, one on top of the other. Try anything once—that's one of my principles."

He goes off, leaving the door ajar. In the corridor, sounds of shuffling feet. The aged tragedian gropes his way in the darkness. He stops at the door for a moment, and a shaft of light from the dressing room falls not only on the glorious uniform of the Grenadiers, but also on Beautey's bloodshot eyes and horrible hanging underlip.

BEAUTEY, *to Mitsou:* "Everything all right, girlie?"

MITSOU, *hurriedly, leaning close to her mirror:* "Yes, yes; thank you, Monsieur Beautey. . . . Oh! I'm late. . . ."

BEAUTEY: "Do you want me to help you?"

MITSOU, *horrified:* "No! No! Monsieur Beautey, please don't bother. I wouldn't think of it! (*He goes off.*) I'd rather die than look at his face. (*With a shudder.*) People as old as that

shouldn't be on the stage. It isn't decent. Why, I can't even look at a horse that's fallen down in the street."

In the corridor, the noise of ten little wooden heels; the Tirralirra girls go by in good-natured disorder. Mitsou, unconcerned, doesn't turn her head. Next, in single file, come "Black Bread," "Paper Shortage," "Saccharine" and the consumptive little comedian. Then an Old Lady in worn-out shoes goes by, wearing the Academic Palms pinned to the left side of her plush tippet; she is the dresser.

Finally, sounds like the squeals of trapped mice herald the entrance of Petite-Chose into the dressing room. Is Petite-Chose plain or pretty? Well made or badly made? A chit of a girl, whose incessant, highly artificial gesturings prevent any serious estimation of her. Her dyed hair falls in a cloud to the tip of her nose, which in turn goes up to meet it. The blackened eyebrows, comic cheek bones, and the corners of her mouth all turn up as if blown by a sudden gust of wind. Her shoulders shake; her hips move; her hands clutch her throat, either to draw

attention to it, or to hold up her chin; her knees rub each other in walking, but who can tell whether it is because Petite-Chose is cold, or because she chooses to be ridiculous or simply because she's knock-kneed? A mystery. If Petite-Chose fell into the Seine, her best friends, summoned to the morgue, would not be able to recognize her: No one, to tell the truth, has ever really seen her.

PETITE-CHOSE, *in a shabby wrapper, wearing a painted cardboard imitation banana on her head, throws herself upon Mitsou:* "Hide them for me, Mitsou, for heaven's sake, hide them for me! They're trying to throw them out and hold me up for a fine!"

MITSOU, *calmly, with raised eyebrows:* "Who?"

PETITE-CHOSE: "These two infants. They're so sweet! (*points to corridor*). Hide them while Boudou is making his rounds! (*Wheedling, twirling and spinning about.*) No one will bother them in here. You're the star and you have a right to receive all the company you like!"

MITSOU, *with dignity:* "It would hardly be worth while being the star, if you couldn't receive company, but I never do have anyone in here, and I don't want people I don't know."

PETITE-CHOSE, *urgently:* "Only for a minute, Mitsou! Put them in your wardrobe! They're so handsome! (*Without waiting for an answer, she calls in a low voice down the corridor.*) Hurry up, you two! Come quick!"

She pulls two young second lieutenants into the dressing room. One is in khaki, the other in horizon blue. The one in khaki is very good looking; the one in blue is more so.

MITSOU, *glancing at them as though they were two pieces of furniture:* "I have nothing to do with all this!"

THE KHAKI: "Mademoiselle Mitsou, we've just been admiring you so much. Allow me to present . . ."

MITSOU, *seeming not to hear, to Petite-Chose over the head of the lieutenant in khaki:* "You understand, I suppose, that if my friend suddenly decided to

come in before the second act, bringing some business friends of his from the stage box, I'd have a nice time of it!"

THE BLUE, *irritated by Mitsou's lack of attention:* "Mademoiselle Mitsou, I shall no longer impose on you ——"

MITSOU, *continuing to Petite-Chose:* "You understand, it makes no difference to me whether they're in my wardrobe or somewhere else. That's not the point. It's the look of the thing. You know I'm not the sort of person who . . ."

PETITE-CHOSE, *irresistible:* "I know, I know! But you'll do it for me. You're so nice! (*To the two lieutenants.*) Here, you two, hustle into the wardrobe! (*To Mitsou.*) There's plenty of excitement back here tonight, I can tell you; why Boudou found a boy of the class of '17 in that great horse of a Weiss woman's closet! He says he's going to get it reported to the management; he's certainly a pest, that man."

BOUDOU, *opening the door, obliging but*

suspicious: "Your turn in five minutes, Mademoiselle Mitsou." (*He looks hard at Petite-Chose who has closed the wardrobe door on the two lieutenants.*)

PETITE-CHOSE, *pleasantly:* "How's everything, Boudou? How's the foot?"

BOUDOU, *coldly:* "Pretty well. . . . If there's no improvement by Thursday, I shall wash it and afterwards I'll put on a cotton sock and then a wool sock."

PETITE-CHOSE: "Great remedies for great evils, Boudou!"

He goes out, and Petite-Chose opens the wardrobe. The two occupants flattened against the back of the cupboard wouldn't change places with anyone for the Croix de Guerre. They are silent, but none the less thrilled.

PETITE-CHOSE: "What he wouldn't have done to you if it hadn't been for me, that old policeman on patrol! Heavens, my turn is on! I've got to fly! Stay there till I come back! (*She kisses them both with amazing agility and whispers to the lieutenant in blue, pointing at Mitsou*): Don't count too much on her

for keeping up the conversation. (*She rushes out, calling back*): Be good, darlings! You're in high society now!"

This parting shot draws a condescending smile from Mitsou, who is left alone with the two young men, still standing upright and rigid in the wardrobe. She throws off her kimono, which leaves her clad only in tights, long strawberry-colored stockings, and a tulle chemise. Calmly she pulls up the drawstring of the tights and fastens it at her waist, opens her legs to smooth out all the wrinkles on the inside, and with great caution, puts over her head the fluff of dark red tulle, which constitutes her costume for the "Jacqueminot Rose." She powders her armpits and the hollow of her throat, every gesture showing a cheerless ease and an absent-minded immodesty which banishes all coquetry. When she is ready, she feels she must say something to the lieutenants: "Is everything alright in the wardrobe?" Her voice is dry as a crust and it offends them.

THE BLUE, *all eyes, but extremely correct:*

"Quite alright, Madame, thank you."

MITSOU: "So I'm Madame now, am I? That's a quick promotion. (*Silence. She tries to hook her belt in the back, but can't manage it.*): Where in heaven's name has that old frump of a dresser gone?"

THE BLUE, *emerging from the wardrobe:* "Can I help you, Madame?"

MITSOU: "Yes, please. There are four hooks you see, along the grosgrain; the rest of them I can manage alone, they're snaps. (*She coolly turns her naked back to him.*) Thank you very much."

Without turning, she speaks to the reflection she sees in the mirror. Their two dark young heads, large eyed, resemble each other as though they belonged to brother and sister. Mitsou smiles, the lieutenant in blue smiles, and they look more than ever alike.

THE BLUE, *bowing:* "Don't mention it, Madame. (*He goes back to the wardrobe. Silence.*)

MITSOU, *sitting down, points to the divan:* "I don't ask you to sit there, because as long as Boudou's not on the stage, you're in danger. The moment he goes down to make the off-stage noises, you

can leave. It's Boudou, you know, who does the Screams of the Damned, the Glazier, and the flower pot falling out of the window."

THE KHAKI, *in order to say something:* "Why, he must be Proteus!"

MITSOU, *simply:* "No, his name is Boudou. They've had him, ever since the revue opened." (*Silence. Mitsou polishes her nails.*)

THE BLUE, *politely:* "And . . . are you pleased with your parts in the revue, Madame?" (*He speaks coldly, but he looks at Mitsou with ardor. Each time he calls her Madame, she indicates surprise by slightly lifting her finely arched eyebrows.*)

MITSOU: "Very pleased. Especially as you need more than talent to succeed here."

THE BLUE AND THE KHAKI: "Oh, really?"

MITSOU, *with importance:* "The thing that makes it hard to get a part here is your age. The management doesn't engage any girl over twenty-five. That's a rule of the house. I'm twenty-four."

THE BLUE: "So am I."

MITSOU: "No? How funny!"

THE BLUE: "What's funny about that?"

THE KHAKI: "Do you suppose Mademoiselle Petite-Chose isn't over twenty-five?"

MITSOU: "So she says. But you probably know her better than I do."

THE KHAKI AND THE BLUE: "Oh, no!"

MITSOU: "Really?"

THE KHAKI, *alone:* "Tonight is the first time we've seen her. One of our friends introduced us and skipped, the wretch, when the crime was discovered—you know—the boy of the class of '17 in Mme. Weiss' room. We had no idea that they were so strict, at a café-concert."

MITSOU, *shocked:* "This is a music-hall, it isn't a café-concert. Anyway, it's necessary. Think what would happen without it! . . . But I can receive callers in my dressing room. It's in my contract."

THE BLUE: "And do you receive many?"

MITSOU, *with dignity:* "What an idea! No one, of course."

At this last remark, there is a knock on

the door. Mitsou, astonished, opens her mouth, raises her eyebrows and says nothing. Another knock, the door opens, and Mitsou's friend enters: a Man of Means, in the full splendor of his fifty years.

MAN OF MEANS, *kissing Mitsou's hand:* "Hello, little girl. (*He turns, sees the two lieutenants in the wardrobe, and exclaims*) Oh! (*He is agitated, but soon regains composure and essays the easy manner*) : I've often told you, my dear, that you wouldn't have room for all your knick-knacks in that wardrobe!"

The two young men emerge from the wardrobe. Their faces betray the hope that at last "something really good" will come of their escapade.

MITSOU, *unaccustomed to psychological dramas, is speechless at first, but recovers and confesses the truth. Turning toward the Man of Means and indicating the two officers:* "They're not mine, they belong to Petite-Chose."

MAN OF MEANS, *bitterly:* "Oh! Mitsou!"

MITSOU, "Boudou found them in her dressing room and she put them in my wardrobe."

THE BLUE: "Which we leave, Madame, with all our apologies and our respectful admiration."

THE KHAKI, *an echo:* "Apologies . . . admiration. (*To the Man of Means.*) Monsieur."

MAN OF MEANS, *overcome:* "Monsieur . . . Monsieur. (*Door closes on the two lieutenants. Silence.*) Mitsou!"

MITSOU: "What? (*The Man of Means is reproachfully silent.*) So that's it! Believe me, you're wrong. I've already told you, they belong to Petite-Chose. You know I can't make things up. I'm so stupid about it, I should think you'd know I was telling the truth."

MAN OF MEANS: "Two officers. . . . Two at a time! . . . Ah! Mitsou, I didn't think you did that kind of thing."

MITSOU, *drearily:* "Neither did I. That or any other kind."

MAN OF MEANS, *touched:* "All right, Mitsou. But you must admit that it

looked. . . . They seemed very nice. The one in blue, especially."

MITSOU, *raising her eyes toward the mirror which a short while ago had reflected two young heads.* "Do you think so?"

MAN OF MEANS: "What's his name?"

MITSOU, *surprised:* "Why, that's so, I don't know their names, or who or what they are."

PETITE-CHOSE, *in the corridor:* "Are you there, Mitsou?"

MITSOU, *opening the door, severe:* "Come in!"

PETITE-CHOSE, *out of breath:* "So you sent them away? It's a lucky thing I met them; they were going down."

MITSOU: "First of all, apologize to my friend; you almost gave him heart failure! Think of his arriving here and finding two soldiers in my wardrobe!"

PETITE-CHOSE, *making up to the Man of Means, from force of habit:* "Oh! did I, Monsieur? Don't be angry with me, Monsieur, or with Mitsou either! They're so good looking! Did you

notice—especially the one in blue? His eye . . ."

MAN OF MEANS, *jealous:* "Well, what about his eye? Is it a glass eye?"

PETITE-CHOSE, *indignant:* "A glass eye! It's an eye of flame! And his mouth? Did you see his mouth, Monsieur? Mitsou, you noticed his mouth? And his nostrils, Monsieur, did you see them? Lovely little nostrils that quiver when he breathes hard. You know, on thinking it over, the Khaki one is just as attractive. He has a beautiful complexion; did you notice it, Monsieur?"

MAN OF MEANS, *drily:* "I must admit that I didn't give them the close attention you did."

PETITE-CHOSE, *quivering:* "You see, nothing's hidden from me, Monsieur. Oh . . . you'll miss the ballet of the 'Algerian Chasseurs'!"

MAN OF MEANS: "I've seen it already."

PETITE-CHOSE, *with society manner:* "So you'll stay on with us? How charming!"

MAN OF MEANS: "No, I'm going to rejoin

my guests, two wheat brokers, whom I left out in the box."

PETITE-CHOSE: "Two wheat brokers? Oh! Send them to me, Monsieur! Are they handsome?"

MAN OF MEANS: "One is my uncle, the other is his brother-in-law."

PETITE-CHOSE, *making a face as though she were taking a dose of salts:* "Ugh! Dirty swindling profiteers!"

The Man of Means goes out.

MITSOU, *with gravity:* "Look at all the trouble you might have made me this evening, with your military baggage! Fortunately, I've got an intelligent man to deal with!"

PETITE-CHOSE, *equally solemn:* "An intelligent man's girl is going to pull the wool over his eyes sooner or later, or he's not an intelligent man. As for trouble and bother, that's all life is!"

She flounces onto the sofa, wriggling her whole body except her knees, because of the silk stockings.

MITSOU, *dignified and bored:* "Thank goodness, in the last three years since I've

been with Pierre, I've forgotten what trouble is."

PETIT-CHOSE, *opening wide her small incredulous eyes:* "No, really? Not even a quarrel? Not even a making up?"

MITSOU, *pensive:* "Not even that. He doesn't quarrel; I don't look for trouble: result, peace."

PETIT-CHOSE: "Gracious! Things can't be any too gay at your place. What about the front?"

MITSOU: "What front?"

PETITE-CHOSE, *shocked:* "What front! Why, the front! The war! You must have someone, some little love interest at the front."

MITSOU: "No, because I've been with Pierre since June, 1914."

PETITE-CHOSE, *feet in the air:* "Oh, that reason! By the way, the two good-looking kids who were in here, what part of the front are they on?"

MITSOU: "I don't know."

PETITE-CHOSE: "Didn't you ask them?"

MITSOU: "No."

PETITE-CHOSE: "What did you talk about, then?"

MITSOU: "I don't know. . . . They asked me if I liked my parts in the Revue."

PETITE-CHOSE, *leaping up:* "Your parts! The Revue. There's a subject of conversation for you, with lieutenants on leave! Where on earth were you brought up? Heavens! I haven't their address! I've got to get it! I've got to find them."

She shoots into the corridor like a cannon ball. The Old Lady dresser comes in noiselessly, and Mitsou, lost in thought, doesn't notice her.

OLD LADY, *in a barely audible whisper in Mitsou's ear:* " 'Captive Flowers' is on!"

MITSOU, *screams and puts her hand to her breast:* "Oh! You'll give me heart disease, that's certain! I'd like to know where you got your spooky ways."

OLD LADY, *murmuring:* "I was a trained nurse before the war."

MITSOU: "What a lot of deaths from shock you must have on your conscience! Hand me my spear!"

She grasps a wooden spear, festooned with roses, and studies her lovely flowerlike reflection in the mirror. Is there a great difference, after all, in a very young face, between an expression of passive serenity, and one of hopeless despair? Petite-Chose comes in waving a card, and jumping up and down, feet together.

PETITE-CHOSE, *screaming:* "I've got it! I've got it! Names, addresses, postal sector, everything!"

MITSOU: "Have they gone?"

PETITE-CHOSE: "Gone? They won't budge. They say it's much more amusing here than out in front! I'll hurry and get through with my scene and come back!"

MITSOU: "Where are they?"

PETITE-CHOSE: "In Christophette Colombus's closet. What doings, my dear! They're handing in beer and cakes to them. Everyone is sick with laughing!"

She runs off, clucking with joy, and Mitsou goes slowly down toward the stage with the punished resigned look of all good children on her face.

II

Two days later, same scene. Ten o'clock. Mitsou is putting on the costume she wears in the final tableau: "The Red Glory." The costume is composed of a small quantity of flame-colored chiffon, a crimson velvet stomacher, and a sword of silvered wood.

MITSOU, *yawning:* "I don't know what's the matter with me tonight, my stomach's upside down and I've got a pain under

my ribs. I must have eaten too many calories, as my friend says. (*The Old Lady, wearing her decoration and her old shoes, wags a knowing head.*) So you know what calories are, do you?"

OLD LADY: "Naturally."

MITSOU: "I don't. Whenever my friend tries to explain the calorie business to me, I always think I'm going to understand and then my brain stops working, at the same moment each time. . . (*Dreamily.*) It's like that in everything. He's out of luck with me. (*Mitsou studies her reflection in silence, then suddenly.*) And anyway, I'm sick of myself in all this red. First the 'Jacqueminot Rose,' then the 'Red Spirit of Victory,' God! Where have they got to, downstairs?"

OLD LADY, *frivolous, showing off:* "*Chi lo sa?*"

MITSOU: "Don't bother with any of that on my account; it doesn't impress me in the least. Open the door, so I can listen."

OLD LADY, *after opening door:* "It's the

scene of the 'Exotic Products,' I can hear Mademoiselle Petite-Chose's voice."

MITSOU: "You have good ears. (*Silence. A knock.*) Who is it?"

A VOICE: "A package for Mademoiselle Mitsou. (*The package passes from the hands of the Old Lady to those of Mitsou.*)

MITSOU, *turning the package over and over before cutting the string:* "What Saint's Day is it today?"

OLD LADY, *without hesitation:* "Saint Maurille."

MITSOU, *in all seriousness:* "I don't know anyone who would send me mushrooms."

She undoes the package which contains two small bottles, a cut-glass powder box finely engraved, and a letter.

MITSOU, *slowly reading:*

" 'Madame,

" 'I am the lieutenant in blue, all alone, because my khaki friend's leave of absence finished before mine. I decided, on leaving the music-hall night before last, that you

must have devoted the whole of your month's salary to the purchase of the sixteen horsepower Renaud which awaited you outside, since the powder in your dressing room was falling out of the original cardboard box, and the bottle of verbena toilet water still bore the label of the store from which it came. Will you, in return for a hospitality which was imposed on you, pour verbena and powder into these crystal containers? They are of no great value, and, should you, on hearing this, be unpleasantly surprised, I can only say, 'C'est la guerre.'

Yours very sincerely
'The Lieutenant in Blue.' "

MITSOU, *having laboriously read to the end, looks at the three articles, then at the letter, then at the three articles, and begins to re-read in a low voice:*

" 'Madame,

" 'I am the lieutenant in blue, all alone. . . . ' (*to the Old Lady*) But why does he call me Madame?"

OLD LADY: "Out of delicacy."

MITSOU: "Perhaps it's delicate, but it's not

polite. Give me the powder box, so that I can put some powder in it."

OLD LADY: "It's not a powder box."

MITSOU: "Not a powder box?"

OLD LADY: "No. It's a jam jar."

MITSOU, *outraged:* "A jam jar? Why not say it's a coffee pot?"

OLD LADY, *stubborn:* "Because it's a jam jar. An extremely pretty jam jar of the Restoration period. But you can use it for powder, just the same."

MITSOU: "Much obliged for your permission! (*Bell rings in corridor. Mitsou jumps up.*) That's my cue! Quick, my sword. . . . If it isn't too tiring for you, while I'm on the stage, put the powder in the jam jar and the verbena in the bottles. Put some in both of them; make it come out even!"

She goes out. The Old Lady begins to behave in a strange fashion, that is to say, she fills the bottles and yet steals none of the perfume for her handkerchief, or for a little private bottle of her own. She refrains, though alone, from sniffling, from belching, from picking her nose, from reading the let-

ter which lies open on the dressing table, and from appropriating bits of absorbent cotton: a funny old character, greatly changed by the war. Someone knocks.

OLD LADY, *quickly hiding the letter and envelope in the pocket of her apron:* "Come in!"

MAN OF MEANS, *well turned out as usual:* "Mademoiselle is on the stage?"

OLD LADY: "Yes, Monsieur; she's on for 'Red Glory.' "

MAN OF MEANS, *stopping in front of the crystals:* What are these?"

OLD LADY: "Two bottles and a powder box. I say powder box, but it's really a jam . . ."

MAN OF MEANS, *interrupting:* "Where do they come from?"

OLD LADY: "From Dauvel's, Monsieur, you can see the label."

MAN OF MEANS, *irritated:* "Who sent them?"

OLD LADY: "I don't know. Perhaps Mademoiselle Mitsou bought them? Mademoiselle is not very well fixed here for toilet articles."

MAN OF MEANS, *troubled:* "Not well fixed? You're right, it certainly is shabby here! Twenty times, I've tried. . . . But she always tells me that a music-hall dressing room. . . . And that in any case, for an entertainment during war time. . . ."

OLD LADY, *moved:* "Ah! What a lovely spirit!"

MAN OF MEANS, *continuing:* ". . . for an entertainment during war time, when they don't really know whether they'll be able to give fifteen more performances. . . . (*Walks up and down, agitated.*) I assure you, I've really insisted. . . . My upholsterer was to do over . . ."

The Man of Means begins all his phrases with an astonishing ease, but rarely finishes them. Silence. Return of Mitsou, who emerges from her "Red Glory" as from a Turkish bath. On the way up, she has undone her small crimson belt, taken off her gilded laurel crown, and is dragging her silver sword after her as though it were a broom.

MITSOU, *opening the door; out of breath:* "Lord, what a crowd! (*Catching sight of her friend.*) Hello! You here?"

MAN OF MEANS, *kissing her hand:* "Little girl! . . ."

MITSOU, *making sure that the letter has disappeared:* "I'm hot, as you can see. Are you a regular subscriber here now? Or perhaps you're making love to Petite-Chose? (*Sits and removes her shoes with a sigh, which is in no way caused by jealousy.*) My poor feet!" (*Watches his face in mirror.*)

MAN OF MEANS: "Mitsou?"

MITSOU, *removing her make-up:* "Here I am, it's me."

MAN OF MEANS: "I didn't know you had this crystal ware."

MITSOU: "Neither did I."

MAN OF MEANS: "Did you buy it yourself?"

MITSOU: "Do you see me doing much shopping?"

MAN OF MEANS: "But then. . . . Where do. . . . What does this . . . ?"

MITSOU, *who looks, under a layer of cold cream, like a rose in process of melting:*

"It means appreciation from an admirer."

MAN OF MEANS: "A what?"

MITSOU: "An admirer."

MAN OF MEANS: "I thought you said an aviator."

MITSOU, *suspending operations:* "Do aviators wear blue?"

MAN OF MEANS: "That depends. Usually they wear black for full dress, and the trousers have a band. . . ."

MITSOU: "Black? I don't know anyone who wears that."

MAN OF MEANS: "Luckily! Well, Mitsou, can I know the name of this admirer?"

MITSOU: "Perhaps, but I personally have no idea of it." And suddenly realizing that she is telling the truth, without appearing to, she looks into her mirror, and sees on her face a new and slightly wicked gleam—guile.

MAN OF MEANS, *piqued:* "Madame is laughing."

MITSOU, *turning round with unexpected abruptness:* " 'Madame,' why 'Madame?' Since when have I been 'Madame'?"

MAN OF MEANS, *non-plussed:* "But Mitsou, that's only a manner of speech. You say 'Madame is laughing,' just as you'd say 'Madame is most kind'."

MITSOU, *stiffly:* "Well, as it happens, I don't feel like laughing, and I'm not kind, tonight!"

MAN OF MEANS: "Mitsou!"

MITSOU, *with warmth:* "It's true, though!"

MAN OF MEANS: "What's true?"

MITSOU: "That you're trying to cross-examine me. You ask me: 'Who sent you the glass?' I answer: 'I don't know,' because I don't know. I'm not in the habit of making up stories! Whenever I receive flowers on first nights, or no matter what else, don't I always show you the cards and everything?"

MAN OF MEANS: "Why yes, Mitsou. . . ."

MITSOU: "Exactly. Well, then, when I tell you that I don't know the person who sent me this . . . this . . . (*interrogatory look at the Old Lady*) this jam jar, it's because I don't know; that's plain!"

MAN OF MEANS, *who has not heard her talk*

this way during all the two unclouded but sunless years: "Yes, yes, Mitsou! Calm yourself, little girl! It's the heat. . . . And then, three matinées this week. . . . Tomorrow, I'll have a special bottle of brandy brought to your dressing room, It's 1848. . . ."

MITSOU, *nervously dressing:* "Oh, no! I have enough bottles already! Let's go! (*Angry look around dressing room.*) It's horrible in here! The walls are disgusting! And that table! Ugh!"

MAN OF MEANS: "But it's you who would never let . . . No later than tomorrow morning I shall have my upholsterer . . ." (*A knock.*)

MITSOU, *very nervous, starting:* "Who is it? Who is it?"

A VOICE: "Madame Mitsou?"

MITSOU: "Yes, what is it?"

VOICE: "It's a message from Madame's chauffeur, who wants Madame to know that he is waiting for her at the end of the street, because the police won't allow him to stand where he ordinarily waits for Madame."

MAN OF MEANS: "Very well, very well. Here . . . (*He partly opens the door and hands out a tip. On turning round he observes with astonishment that there is a tear in the corner of Mitsou's eye.*) Mitsou! What's the matter, little girl?"

MITSOU: "Oh! nothing . . . (*stammering*) It's . . . it's the heat. . . . And then, three . . . three matinées this week. . . . (*suddenly sobbing*) And . . . And what's the matter with everybody tonight? Calling me 'Madame' . . . all those vulgar people! (*She goes down staircase in tears, followed by the Man of Means, in consternation.*)

III

Mitsou's apartment. The ground floor, "with every convenience,"—every convenience that one can have for a rent of three thousand francs in the neighborhood of the Trocadéro. There are two rather large rooms on the street, and two smaller ones on the court. The court, be it understood, is "a large, well-lighted court, ornamented with growing plants." The bathroom, the

clothes closets, the kitchen and pantry occupy a vaguely defined region between the court and the street. Here, the electric light and a blue-gray daylight issuing from two dumb-waiter wells produce an effect which is far from cheerful. There is a sour odor of cellars, gas, dish water, and metal-polish.

Mitsou's furnishings are extraordinary, in spite of her good intentions. As soon as her means permitted, she gathered together with avidity everything she had coveted during her impoverished childhood. Nothing is missing; the brass chandelier, shaped like a Merovingian crown, hangs over the dining room table and its jewels reflect colored lights onto the china below—china which is extremely "correct," being of white porcelain with initials in gold. And white damask table linen, and a double bed, ornamented with garlands, upon which two plaster cherubs pour from the ceiling a cascade of embroidered tulle. And a chaise-longue in three pieces covered with pure silk damask.

If the sheets on the bed are less fine than they might be, let us console ourselves with

the fact that Mitsou has tried to add quality to their durability with quantities of hand hemstitching and lace a foot wide. The bathroom, as bathrooms should be, is done in white and blue. The modern dressing table is "very practical," and is one of those pieces of metal furniture which combines all the beauties of a surgeon's table and an American office desk.

When it comes to the drawing room I will mention only the collections of imitation Saxe figures, miniature snuff boxes, and the profusion of Louis XV bouquets; the thickly stuffed "modern-style" sofa cushions, spotted like a clown's face, and striped like railroad signals or jockey caps; and finally a sofa-bookcase which manages to combine incrusted bronze, purple velvet, stained white-wood and mother-of-pearl. A half-hearted sun lights the drawing room and the dining room on the street side, sanctuaries reserved by Mitsou for her "receptions," which is equivalent to saying that she never sets foot in them.

It is half-past eleven. Mitsou is busy with her household duties. Armed with that

frivolous implement which cleans nothing and dirties no one—a small feather duster—she lightly touches the works of art in her boudoir. She is clad in rose-colored pajamas, finished at ankles, wrists and neck with ruffles of tulle; and she is coiffed "à la Chinoise."

MITSOU, *to her maid:* "If I've told you once, I've told you twenty times, that the electric lamps are meant to go the farthest from the clock, and the candlesticks nearest to it!"

MAID, *who looks like all maids who don't get enough sleep:* "Oh! yes . . . I never seem to remember."

MITSOU, *looking at her:* "You certainly do look bilious today!"

MAID, *simply:* "No, Mademoiselle, it's because my fiancé's seven days leave finished this morning."

MITSOU: "Oh! Is it still the same fiancé, the Sergeant?"

MAID: "The same one. Only now he's a second lieutenant."

MITSOU, *attentive:* "Oh! How is he dressed?"

MAID, *astonished:* "Why . . . like a second lieutenant in the Zouaves."

MITSOU, *indifferent:* "Oh! yes, a Zouave. . . . (They're not in blue, are . . . (*Telephone rings.*) Go and answer."

MAID, *returning:* "It's Monsieur who wants to tell Mademoiselle that his stockholders' meeting will make him so late that he won't come to lunch."

MITSOU, *indifferent:* "Alright. (*Humming.*) Alright—alright—alright—alright. You can tell Julienne not to cook the egg-plant, for all I care." (*She dusts in silence.*)

Mitsou knows nothing about thorough cleaning. She knows how to jumble flowers together in a vase, and will patiently return three or four times to arrange the folds of the curtains, but she has not learned the art of polishing a beautiful piece of brass, or of giving a mirror a sheen like that of clear water. Nor does she know how to make ebony glisten under a coat of dark oil. These things will come with the years which bring the first wrinkles, corpulence and avarice.

MITSOU, *suddenly calling:* "Louise! (*the*

maid returns) So now I'll be all alone for lunch!"

MAID: "The same as lots of other times."

MITSOU, *displeased:* "Lots of other times perhaps, but today I'm in a mood when it will spoil my appetite."

MAID: "Mademoiselle's mother might come."

MITSOU: "On Saturday? It would take more than lunch to make my mother leave her clients on Saturday. She reads fortunes for the Duchess of Montmoreau and counts tea leaves for a member of the Municipal Council."

MAID: "Mademoiselle could ask her singing teacher."

MITSOU, *disgusted:* "Yes! and listen to his false teeth click when he eats! Haven't you any good suggestions to make? (*She has an inspiration.*) Call up Mademoiselle Petite-Chose and ask her. That's an idea!"

MAID: "Has Mademoiselle Petite-Chose a telephone?"

MITSOU: "Wagram 66-66."

MAID: "Wagram 66-66. That's our creamery."

MITSOU: "Our creamery? You're joking."

MAID: "My nature's not one for joking. Besides I telephoned the creamery at 11 o'clock. Julienne had forgotten the grated cheese."

MITSOU, *somewhat shaken:* "Try, just the same. I'd be willing to swear I'm right!"

MAID, *goes to telephone and returns disgusted and superior:* "Mademoiselle Petite-Chose will come to lunch."

MITSOU: "Ah! So you see!"

MAID: "Mademoiselle Petite-Chose lives on the court in the creamery man's house. They let her use their 'phone. I knew perfectly well that Mademoiselle Petite-Chose wouldn't be likely to . . .

MITSOU, *stiffly, interrupting:* ". . . to be waited on by an untidy maid. Go and brush your hair. I don't want anyone around with streaming ends, when I'm always so careful to keep mine neat!"

The maid goes out. Mitsou, having routed the dust on the top of a glass case—thereby showing more clearly but to no greater advantage the objects within—de-

cides to dress herself. In five minutes she's ready "underneath," as the saying is, clad in antelope shoes, and knickers of pink chiffon, which are visible beneath her chemise, like the gauze bags on hot house grapes. On top of this, falls a child's old-fashioned dress, or rather an old-fashioned child's dress. It is made of green taffeta and has neither waist line, nor belt, nor seams at the shoulders, nor collar, nor anything at all—not even a skirt below the knee.

She is busy manicuring her nails—badly, that is to say at great expenditure of varnish and carmine—when Petite-Chose comes in, making as much noise as a toy terrier. If she stood still for one minute, you would be able to see that her jersey suit comes from the cheapest department store, that her dented military cap has more cardboard than felt in it, and that her shoes are well worn; but she never gives you time to go into all these details. Her wide gray squirrel neck piece "sets off" her summer costume and reaches up as far as her eyes, eyes which we may call blue—certainly blue as far as the eyelids are concerned.

PETITE-CHOSE, *stepping back, after kisses and exclamations of greeting have been exchanged:* "What on earth made you invite me to lunch?"

MITSOU, *embarrassed:* "I don't know. . . . The fine weather, the . . . the eggplant. . . . Do you like eggplant?"

PETITE-CHOSE: "I'll eat some, if it's there."

MITSOU: "I had an idea you'd like eggplant. Take off your fur and your hat. There's no one but just us two."

PETITE-CHOSE: "It's awfully pretty here. I've only been to see you at night, on the rush, and by electric-light you don't get a good idea of it. It's lucky you haven't any sun to fade your curtains, and sometimes oil paintings don't have good quality color in them."

MITSOU, *modestly:* "Oh! I haven't anything very marvellous, but it's all my own idea. I didn't want anyone to give me any advice about my furnishings."

PETITE-CHOSE: "You know your own taste best yourself, and you shouldn't ever let anybody influence you about furniture. Take me for instance. My place

is just a little nest, but if I'd listened to every one, I'd have thrown out my collection twenty times over.

MITSOU: "Your collection of what?"

PETITE-CHOSE: "Why, of travel souvenirs."

MITSOU, *astonished:* "Have you travelled a lot?"

PETITE-CHOSE: "No, never. They're the travel souvenirs of friends of mine. Before the war, I knew people all over the place."

MITSOU: "That must be interesting."

PETITE-CHOSE, *scornful:* "Oh, Lord! Don't mention the word foreigner to me. Since the war, I don't ask to be shown any more of life, than what comes along in khaki . . . or in blue."

MITSOU, *quickly:* "By the way, I wanted to . . ."

MAID: "Lunch is ready, Mademoiselle."

MITSOU: "I have something to ask you after lunch."

They go into the dining room arm in arm, and sit down under the Merovingian Crown. Luncheon consists of sardines, radishes, rather tasteless lemon sole, grayish

roast beef, soggy fried potatoes, and stuffed eggplant. Mitsou has not yet learned about food. True, they are drinking good Chablis —the gift of the Man of Means—but they are not aware of it.

PETITE-CHOSE, *gazing at a plate:* "Say what you like, white porcelain is the smartest, especially when it's got a monogram. Is your name an Arab name?"

MITSOU: "No, my friend invented it. It's made up of initials. You see, Pierre is a director in two companies, one is called the 'Minoteries Italo-Tarbaises,' and the other is the 'Scieries Orléanaises Unifiées.' So you get M.I.T.S.O.U.—Mitsou."

PETITE-CHOSE, *bursting into laughter:* "No!"

MITSOU, *also laughing:* "Yes!"

PETITE-CHOSE, *convulsed:* "Oh! Oh! Oh! And I told . . . who was it, now? Oh, well! a friend I was introduced to, day before yesterday. Anyway, I told him your name was Persian!"

MITSOU: "Persian?"

PETITE-CHOSE: "Yes, like the Russian Ballet.

Did you ever? (*They laugh.*) My! it's good to laugh!"

MITSOU: "Yes, it cheers you up."

PETITE-CHOSE: "Do you need cheering up?"

MITSOU, *reticent:* "No. But lately I've been a little bit nervous."

PETITE-CHOSE: "It's the time of year. The doctor at the theatre listened to my chest the other day and told me I should go to the country and get fresh air, and good nourishment and change of scene. . . . I grabbed his prescription out of his hand and signed it: Wilson, Poincaré, Albert, George, Victor Emanuel, etc. . . . Good Lord! The country and nourishment. . . . What about a quick end to the war, and my automobile?"

MITSOU: "The country! I've never been, except twice when Pierre took me on trips in his car. I'm a Parisian. The country's bad for me. Why, when Pierre took me to the 'Two Lovers'—don't get excited, it's a hotel—I don't know what got into me; the sunset up there, and all the clouds, and the sky

that went on and on. It made me feel queer. I was all dizzy and choky, and I got to crying for all I was worth. 'Take me away,' I kept saying to Pierre, 'take me away or I shall die!' As soon as I got to Paris, I was all right again. The country certainly does not agree with me."

PETITE-CHOSE, *slightly tipsy from the Chablis:* "Fresh air has a very special effect on *me*. . . . No sooner do I get to the country than I go to bed."

MITSOU: "Does it make you as sick as all that? (*The indecent laugh of Petite-Chose enlightens her.*) Oh! Petite-Chose! Don't you ever think about anything but that?"

PETITE-CHOSE: "Don't *you* ever think about it at all?"

MITSOU, *tipsy from the Chablis, but melancholy:* "Yes, sometimes before . . . never during."

PETITE-CHOSE: "Lord! . . . So it's true that making love is only a pleasure for poor people!"

MITSOU: "Oh! come, I'm not rich yet, and

I used to be poor, and . . ." (*shaking a disillusioned head*).

PETITE-CHOSE, *greatly interested:* "What do you mean? Not really? It's because, my poor Mitsou, you go giving yourself. . . . (*Then, because of maid who comes in with coffee.*) You give your patronage to . . . to dressmaking establishments that don't dress you young enough. Go somewhere else."

MITSOU: "I'm not a customer who changes shops easily. And then, you know the very idea of being unsettled, of complications. . . . I'm not much for new tricks."

PETITE-CHOSE, *vulgarly*: "It would be better if you were! (*They laugh, inhaling the aroma of coffee and cassis.*) Gosh! it's good! I can get along without everything but coffee! Got any sugar, Mitsou?"

MITSOU: "Of course."

PETITE-CHOSE: "Can I have two cups?"

MITSOU: "Of course. When you have coffee it always means two cups."

PETITE-CHOSE: "Except in restaurants."

MITSOU: "I've got some cigarettes. Want one?"

PETITE-CHOSE, *with ostentation:* "So have I, Madame. (*Lights a cigarette.*) And mine's army tobacco, what's more; the two pretty boys gave them to me the other evening."

MITSOU, *taking cigarette from the lips of Petite-Chose:* "Let me see? Which one of them gave it to you? The khaki or the blue?"

PETITE-CHOSE: "I don't remember."

MITSOU: "Did you see them again? Did you . . ." (*She stops.*)

PETITE-CHOSE, *groggy and languid, stirring a large glass of cassis:* "Did I what? (*Mitsou keeps still.*) Oh! I see. Why no, of course not, there wasn't time! They went away. Oh! well, never mind, I'll come across others, just as good looking."

MITSOU: "So you didn't . . ."

PETITE-CHOSE: "No, I didn't, I say! I'd have told you right off." (*Silence—Cigarettes—Coffee—Cassis. . . .*)

MITSOU, *gently:* "You're nice, Petite-Chose.

We've never seen so much of each other before."

PETITE-CHOSE: "When people live side by side, they don't have time to see each other."

MITSOU: "That's absolutely true! Take my friend, for instance, I've seen him every day for the last three years, but I'm not any farther along than I was in the beginning."

PETITE-CHOSE, *wisely:* "Yes, but then that's the way it would be. A steady friend's like a guest. What can you talk to him about? You can ask him about his home, about his business, but it doesn't get you anywhere. 'Good morning, dear, how are the children? Is the youngest over his measles? I can't seem to remember what your partner looks like. How did the stockholders' meeting go? Did it pass off pleasantly?' Just the same old stuff. But with someone you're crazy about or even a pick-up, you know more about him in three-quarters of an hour, than you do about the other one in three years."

MITSOU: "Do you think so?"

PETITE-CHOSE, *peremptorily:* "It's just as I've told you. In three-quarters of an hour—sometimes not so much—you can tell how he makes love, whether he's gay afterwards, if he needs money, whether he's got his pay check, whether he likes your hat, or if he knows your friends, whether he plays the races, and whether he wants to see you again. . . . Everything that's important. Even if you never see him again, it's been something, a memory, somebody who was alive!"

MITSOU, *dreamily:* "It's a memory. . . . You have a lot of . . . of memories, have you?"

PETITE-CHOSE, *pouring out more cassis:* "And there'll be plenty more."

MITSOU, *shocked:* "Oh! Petite-Chose!"

PETITE-CHOSE, *drunkenly:* "Well, and what of it? Petite-Chose? And what's Petite-Chose done now, I ask you? I'm telling you I'm not finished yet! Is it my fault if we're living in times like these?"

MITSOU: "What do you mean, times like these?"

PETITE-CHOSE, *more and more inspired:* "Times like no one's probably ever seen before, since the world began! Did you ever hear of a time when the streets were filled with young men, all kinds of young men, beautiful fellows dressed fit to kill, eyeing us women as if they wanted to eat us alive, and ready the next minute for anything we'll give them? No, you didn't, did you? I suppose there are those who'd like us to keep our hands off! Those who want us to walk the straight and narrow path: 'The impudence of these women knows no bounds, the creatures are simply hanging round the necks of our sons, our husbands, our brothers, our cousins!' Well, I answer them this way: 'Madame!' I say.

MITSOU, *moved:* "Who to?"

PETITE-CHOSE, *paying no attention:* "Madame! I'm no good at knitting! I'm no good at making bandages! Neither can I send packages to the prisoners,

seeing that I haven't the cash. My job is with one thing only, and I'm not likely to wait for the lightning to strike when I see a swell kid standing in front of me! A kid, what's more, who'll probably go off and be killed tomorrow!"

MITSOU, *dismayed:* "No, no, not tomorrow!"

PETITE-CHOSE, *continuing:* "And so, unless you tie me hand and foot, I go ahead, Madame! And I open my arms at whatever hour it pleases me, to whoever I have the time to make happy, even if it's only for ten minutes, and no matter whether he's in khaki, Madame, or in blue."

MITSOU, *with a scream:* "No, no, not the blue!"

PETITE-CHOSE, *brought back to earth:* "What in heaven's name is the trouble? Which blue?"

MITSOU, *beside herself:* "The one in blue! the jam jar one, the one who wrote me the letter!"

PETITE-CHOSE, *leaves her chair and her*

cassis, and runs to Mitsou: "Explain, dearie, explain."

MITSOU, *in one breath:* "I want the address of the lieutenant in blue that you put in my wardrobe who sent me the glass, and who wrote me and didn't put his address!" (*Lets fall her head upon her crossed arms.*)

PETITE-CHOSE: "Well, for heaven's sake!"

MITSOU, *lifting her head, leans against Petite-Chose:* "You see how it is. I know you have the address. I didn't dare ask you for it right away, but give it to me, Petite-Chose, give me the address, please." (*She weeps.*)

PETITE-CHOSE, *as though Mitsou had just won the prize for good conduct:* "Good girl! good girl! That's splendid! It's swell! I'll let you have it. Certainly I'll get you the address. It's marvellous!" (*She embraces Mitsou and rocks her maternally back and forth. Kisses, whispers, conspiracies. . . .*)

IV

Mitsou to the Lieutenant in Blue

"Monsieur,

I don't know how to thank you for the pretty things you sent me. I know enough about beautiful things to be certain that these were picked out by someone with very good taste. If you give me the pleasure of coming back to see me again, you will find all sorts of changes in my dressing room, and

you will see that your lovely glassware occupies the place of honor there.

"I send you my kindest remembrances.

Mitsou.

"P.S.—If it's not asking too much, I'd like to know the date of your next leave."

The Lieutenant in Blue to Mitsou

"Madame,

You have made a fool's bargain with me. To send you, as I did, the smallest most insignificant knick-knacks, and to receive in exchange a note from you, in which humour, spontaneity and Parisian charm flourish together—it's too much. How greatly my comrades would envy me, were I to show them this letter. They would certainly think that it was the beginning of an adventure! But they fail to realize that I have not an adventurous spirit, and that you, in the Revue at the *Empyrée-Montmartre,* are the incarnation of youthful sobriety and desire to do well; in fact the personification of deportment, Madame, deportment with a large D., an automobile, and a steady friend. Have I forgotten any-

thing? If so, I ask your forgiveness in advance, with all the modesty of a man who, although you know his name, persists in remaining, anonymously and respectfully the

Lieutenant in Blue."

Mitsou to the Lieutenant in Blue

"Monsieur,

I was very glad indeed to receive your letter. It took only four days to come, which is not very much at a time like this,—time that somehow doesn't go very fast. Every once in a while, there are days that seem longer than others. You don't know why. The compliments you get then don't give you any pleasure, and often they make you sad. I thought of that when I read your letter. I got more pleasure from looking at your nice handwriting than from re-reading the letter. There are several places in it where you seem to take me for someone else. If you wrote them hoping I wouldn't be able to understand them, that's not a very nice pastime for a young man like you. And if you thought I'd understand them and be upset, you must know that they don't worry

me in the least, and that a woman has no time to be sensitive, when her mind is occupied with other things. At any rate, I have found out from your letter what French officers mean by deportment: a tulle chemise and strawberry colored stockings.

"I say this to you, Monsieur, without malice, and au revoir, and don't forget another time, that I've asked you the date of your next leave. Mitsou."

The Lieutenant in Blue to Mitsou

"Madame,

Few correspondents can boast of putting into a few lines, as you do, so much that is essential: irony, a sense of propriety and mystery. 'The Mystery of the Music Hall Singer!' What a beautiful title for a film in twenty-three parts! So they lied, did they, those large eyes opened wide on life's procession? They were really thinking about something! As for the irony: I cannot, without appearing once again a vulgar person, pretend surprise. I suppose you can't help being affected by the feverish atmosphere of the Music Hall, surrounded by

those gay writers of revues. I knew one once. He was a pretentious bureaucrat, long past the age of the 'Territorial Reserves,' who spent his days classifying interesting tit-bits, lewdness and obscenity alphabetically in a pocket notebook.

"The date of my next leave of absence, Madame, is to be decided on by the Germans. It will be in two months, if they remain well-behaved; perhaps never, if they attack. Isn't it a great pity that my visit to your dressing room depends on people like that?

"I remain, Madame, very respectfully your Lieutenant in Blue."

Mitsou to the Lieutenant in Blue

"It's you who've decided it, Monsieur. You are now my Lieutenant in Blue. How funny words are! If I say 'lieutenant' it's nothing; if I say 'my lieutenant in blue' it becomes very nice. Petite-Chose called one of her friends, 'You old lump of sweetness,' but I make no comparisons. I shall only ask you to call me Mademoiselle. I don't like being called Madame. No special reason.

"I didn't find any 'essential' things in *your* letter. Perhaps you didn't put them in. Unless it was the part where you made fun of the poor fellows who write revues. That part flattered me more than anything else, for I felt as though it was your father who was talking to me. Old people love to make jokes about life behind the scenes as if they knew all about it, and they give little dry chuckles while they talk.

"But on re-reading it I knew that it was really you who were writing. I could see you again as you were in the wardrobe, and just as young. A man must be very young, if he doesn't understand that when a girl tells him she is thinking about *something*, she means *someone*.

"Goodbye, my Lieutenant in Blue. Petite-Chose sends you her best, and I shall make a wish that no harm will come to you.

Mitsou."

The Lieutenant in Blue to Mitsou

"Mademoiselle Mitsou, I fear that today I shall say nothing but foolish things. One should never write to a girl after two sleep-

less nights, of which one was spent on duty. Mademoiselle Mitsou, your simplicity, your apparent simplicity intrigues me more than I like. So that's it, eh? You do a lot of thinking? It goes with our age,—the class of '13, if I'm not mistaken. I too, think. I think of my family; of my military career; of the quick, rather brutal pleasures provided by my leaves of absence and so on. . . .

"But you, Mademoiselle Mitsou, who think—does the amiable countenance of my khaki brother-officer disturb your slumbers? How idiotic I am! Of course it's only a civilian who could possibly count for anything with you. We passers-by are barely able to throw over our shoulders an 'au revoir . . . who knows . . . perhaps . . .' We make promises, but the civilians keep them. The civilians are on the spot and what an advantage they have over us!

"Perhaps your next letter will promote me to the rank of confidant. It's fair; it's 'war,' I suppose, that the confidant—twenty-four years old and in the trenches—should humbly listen to the love story of his lucky rival, who is doubtless old enough to

be his father. Mademoiselle Mitsou, I await your confession. You have my gratitude for a phrase you absent-mindedly wrote, just at the moment when I most needed it: 'I shall make a wish that no harm will come to you.'

Your respectful and weary
Lieutenant in Blue."

Mitsou to the Lieutenant in Blue

"My dear Lieutenant in Blue,

I couldn't help laughing when I read your letter, first because I was happy from the moment I saw the envelope, and then because you said: 'A phrase you absent-mindedly wrote.' Absent-minded! Good heavens! It's not hard to see that you write easily. How could I possibly be absent-minded, when in order to write I have to pay strict attention to everything, to the hand-writing, to the spelling, to putting things so that you will understand them! Oh! no, my mind doesn't wander when I write to you. And now is not the time for me to be careless and relax, just when you're beginning to think well of me!

"So my letters don't bore you too much?

What shall I say about yours? You don't realize, you see, that I've never corresponded with anyone. I belong to Paris, and I never leave it. The people I know are also Parisians, and it's easier and quicker to pay for a telephone message than to send a letter. I'm trying to make you understand that to write a letter is an event in my life, especially as the letters are for you. I cannot measure very well the difference there is between the kind of letters I write you, and those you deserve to get. But I write you truthfully. And stupid as Mitsou is, she'll know when the time comes to stop writing. Those things, thank Heaven, you learn without any need of grammar.

"I admit that I tried to make fun of you just a little in my first letters. Well, why not? In the little that I saw of you, you seemed so young, so serious, almost a 'Mitsou-man!' Like Mitsou, you're afraid that someone will let you down; like her, you take your career seriously; and perhaps you say to yourself as she does: 'Let's not forget that we are only twenty-four years old, and that frivolity is for older people!'

"Because of this idea I have of you, I'd like to be able to forgive you everything, and to overlook nothing. And I like to think that we might be rivals, rivals as two friends are, or two twins. It gives me self-confidence and the right to ask questions, for instance these two:

"1st—Is a night on duty very dangerous?

"2nd—Do you need anything that's unuseful? Because families always think of useful things to send, but not the other kind. It would make me so happy to send you some nice useless thing.

"It's lovely in Paris now. I hope it is with you too; and I hope especially that the weather will be like this in two months, I mean in a month and a half, exactly. I enjoy it from ten o'clock on, each morning. You will think that's very late, but I don't have to be up any earlier, because no letters come before ten o'clock. I made inquiries. There's another mail at noon, which is very convenient because the person you met in my dressing-room comes to lunch at one o'clock and I'd rather have the mail beforehand. After that, I can go out to do er-

rands or whatever else, and I don't have to worry because there is no more mail, I mean interesting mail, before seven or half-past.

"At half-past six, I have large tea, and as the mail is pretty uncertain these days, it sometimes happens that on getting home from the music-hall I find a letter which came after I left. That is what happened with your last letter, and it took me as much by surprise as if I'd found someone alive in my room.

"I've written you such a lot, and most of it is very foolish, but I enjoyed writing it so much that I haven't the courage to tear it up. I wish you good-night, my dear Lieutenant in Blue, and I do hope it is not going to be another night on duty.

Mitsou."

The Lieutenant in Blue to Mitsou

"Mitsou, I have your letter. I reread it, amazed that a little girl who willingly goes naked can hide so much of herself. Mitsou, I haven't forgotten, I couldn't forget the charm of all that your lofty indifference

permitted me to observe from the depths of the wardrobe. But it was not during that observation that I wanted to cry out: 'Who are you really, Mitsou?' I ask you this today, as though I had never seen you. Mitsou without any pretense at style; Mitsou, with the school girl's hand writing, has never failed in her letters to tell me exactly what she wished, no more and no less. You didn't answer, Mitsou, when I questioned you (with an attempt to be lightly ingenuous) as to the favorite object of your thoughts. You didn't answer, but . . . you supplied me with an exact schedule for the distribution of mails in Paris.

"Oh! discreet Mitsou, you have shown me what romance there is in a railroad time table! The most delightful and the most provoking part of an adventure is when two people, who as yet know nothing of one another, have already acquired the necessitous habit of being together at certain hours. . . Mitsou—I want to call you just Mitsou, may I?—a little more and I'll embark on terms of endearment. But no, I won't, after all. One's first intimate words come

irrepressibly and imperatively, and this does not happen in a letter.

"No, dear Mitsou, a night on duty is not very dangerous. But it is a test wherein one carries two burdens made heavy by the length of the night: responsibility and solitude. Responsibility is the lighter of the two, for you can measure it, learn it, become worthy of it. But solitude fills you with dreams and shuddering fears, with a longing to call out which must be repressed, and an exaggerated sensitiveness that must be overcome. Perhaps I shouldn't say all this, Mitsou.

"Do you really want to give me what Richard Wagner called the 'intoxicating superfluity'? (He would not have been able to hit upon your delicious phrase: 'If you need anything that's un-useful.') Here goes. I need:

"1st—A photograph of Mitsou.

"2nd—A piece of strawberry-colored velvet as big as my two large hands, to cover a book that I'm fond of. The shade? That of the 'Jacqueminot Rose' stockings.

"That's all for the present. My wants are

not at an end, however; far from it! Dear Mitsou, I respectfully kiss your long small hand, and I am your

Lieutenant in Blue."

Mitsou to the Lieutenant in Blue

"My dear Lieutenant in Blue.

"Many a woman on receiving your last letter, would have believed that she had received a love letter. I didn't, luckily. In spite of the difficult words, from time to time, in your letters, there is no danger of my making any mistake as to what they really say. I am flattered enough, as it is, without looking for anything more.

"The picture of Mitsou and the piece of velvet are being sent in a little package, separately. The velvet is a good match and the photo is 'Rose Jacqueminot' too. But how dark and dreary all that red is in a photograph! I don't want any more rôles in red—it's too depressing.

"Petite-Chose wanted me to send you a life-preserving sachet, like those she sends to her friends. They are sachets in which she puts nothing but kisses. Instead, I send you,

as I did before, only my sincere wish that nothing harmful may happen to you. This last sentence, I remember, was one of those they used to make me write on lace paper for New Year's day, when I was small. I am very sorry not to be able to invent a more beautiful one for you. But never mind! My wish is better than a beautiful phrase, because a phrase doesn't really exist, and my wish does exist. It exists as much as the little swallow did, or the dove, on the writing paper of my childhood. I can see it flying, moving,—it is real, it is near you, on your head, on your breast,—I can see it as though I were there, on your breast. . . . The sachet of Petite-Chose would certainly have been very pretty and very well embroidered, but it would not have covered a big enough place. I feel safer with my wish. You are wrapped in it, from head to foot.

"How funny you are, my dear Lieutenant in Blue, with your 'Who are you really, Mitsou?' I should never have thought that you could have played the part of a music hall comedian so well: 'But who are you

really, my lovely child?' If I were still at the Mayol, playing in the Christmas revue, I would answer you, in a costume of two wings, a helmet and a spear: 'I? I am Heroic Love!'

"I am not Heroic Love. I am nothing at all unusual, I assure you. You saw all there was of me the evening of the wardrobe: a little actress, young, not ugly, who pleases the public and hasn't much talent. My modesty surprises you? Oh! Come—We know very well, almost all of us, just what to play up in the Music Hall, and we put all we've got into it. Look at Petite-Chose for instance; she's got her type. She's never still a minute, twisting, turning, and jumping about all over the place. Mine is the child type, and because I have a neat face and eyes which I open so wide that it hurts my forehead—since they look best that way with my long legs, my small mouth and my silly nose—writers of revues exclaim: 'She will be marvellous in difficult parts; we'll keep them for her!' You see how easy it is. But your ideas are not like those of revue writers. So please don't try

looking any farther than you have for Mitsou. Didn't I undress before you? If I had thought of anything wrong, I would have put up the screen. I know I said hardly three words, and I couldn't even find a way of explaining the situation, when the person you know of came into my dressing room. There, that's all. That's all there is of Mitsou who was once a nice little milliner, but who grew afraid of what she knew best, poverty and the work room. So she decided to try the thing she knew least, and climbed onto the boards. We always think it will be easier to succeed in doing something we haven't learned, instead of something we have learned; that's natural.

"You know about my private life, on whom it depends, and will, until the moment comes when I no longer want it to depend on anyone. My friends? The list is soon made. I am too young to have men friends. At my age, these friendships spoil quickly. As for the women—that doesn't go very well either. You come across those who've cut loose, who have no respect for anything. They drink, they smoke

opium. I know some who have become stenographers, since the war, or telephone girls, but they treat you like dirt. I meet others, but they are my kind, and are the worst of all. At the end of an hour with one of them, I say to myself, 'Heavens, is this what I am like? Am I already, at my age, as ordinary, as drab off the stage as this? I might as well have stayed face to face with my own mirror; it would embarrass me less.' There you are! But then, you soon learn to live fairly well alone. Unless some great event. . . . There are only three great events which can happen to us, in our lives: death, theatrical fame, or love. My dear Lieutenant in Blue, which of these three is the one that will fall first on my head, or on my heart? I am waiting.

"No, no, don't kiss my hands—not even in a letter. They are not beautiful enough, the liquid powder spoils them, and besides I've put too much varnish on my nails. But I've begun to take care of my hands, to improve them for your coming. Kiss instead, the hollow of my arm, where it has so many tiny green and blue rivers that in kissing it

you will be able to think only of your staff officer's map. "Your

Mitsou."

"P.S.—I want a photograph, too!"

The Lieutenant in Blue to Mitsou

"Dear Mitsou—

I want to see you. I want to see you. What else can I say? I want to see you. I feel gentle, weak, vague, as though I were leaning toward something yielding and deep, and obscure, which draws me to it. I am happy and yet feel deprived of everything. There is anxiety and also a sense of inertia, one and the other equally charming. A state of adolescence. . . . Your photograph makes me think of you, first, and then of a phrase of Francis Jammes about a young girl 'who was like a little dark rose, and who sang . . .' Mitsou, will you kiss me? I ask you because I need it very much. Our long past, eight weeks of frankness, compels me to keep nothing from you. Mitsou, kiss me. When I think of fastening a *gros grain* belt at your back, taking great care not to pinch your skin under the tulle, I remember that

the petunia-colored rouge on your cheeks made your arms and the line of your back look green under the harsh light, green like the white lilacs they force to bloom in winter. I remember that coolly, chastely, in order to help me, you raised your thin arms. Mitsou, I don't like the smell of verbena. I only like the perfume—a tea-rose faded and dropping its petals in a sandalwood box which once held a little fine tobacco—the perfume that is Mitsou.

" 'All sorts of changes' in your dressing-room? Why? Wait, let me look at it again as I saw it once from the depths of your wardrobe. Don't change it. Turn out only one piece of furniture. A piece of furniture which came in that night, while I was there, a piece which must have been 55 or 56 years old—a bad period. All will be well if you do this. Oh! dear, dear Mitsou, how everything in you enchants me, and especially the solicitude your letters show to let me have every detail of your existence—an existence which is sad and bright, and as empty as a new attic! Do you know that mine is scarcely more furnished? Mitsou,

we boys of twenty-four were snatched by the war just as we were leaving the doors of our schools. The war made men of us, and I think that we have missed for always the experience of being youths. We have lost those precious years which should have given us a certain poise in voice and gesture, established the habits of freedom, and of family; when we might have learned to approach, without fear and without ferocity, women who are not always thinking of our money or our desire. Mitsou, forgive me for bothering you with these things. You see, just now my regrets have an object, and I find myself hesitating between two possibilities: shall I come to you as a school boy grown old, or as a man insufficiently matured, like fruit out of season,—ripe on one side, green on the other?

"Mitsou, listen: in ten days, Mitsou, I . . . Yes, in ten days I shall be in Paris for forty-eight hours,—a short leave. The brutality of this announcement stuns me. I have just blushed as one blushes at a gesture made in a crowd toward a voluptuous breast. One is ashamed afterwards.

"Here is the photograph you asked me for. It is yellow and has come unglued, and I look very ugly, frowning in the sun. The little undulations which you see in the distance, through the cut in the wall of earth, are the German lines, to hell with them—at 400 yards! Mitsou, how good the crimson velvet smells,—I keep it close to me while I sleep.

Your Lieutenant in Blue."

Mitsou to the Lieutenant in Blue

"Dear Lieutenant in Blue.

I've lost all my courage for writing; I'm going to see you! I've already seen you again in the photograph which you say is bad. But it seems to me, until it almost makes me lightheaded, that you chose it because there's nothing more beautiful in the world than your outline against the sky, and also because it shows so well your nice figure, and your way of holding your head, of raising your chin. No, no, don't say it's bad, there's everything I like in it, everything to make my heart beat faster, everything to disturb me. I can't hold on any longer, you

see. You don't know how I've held myself in since the day when instead of sending you that stupid letter, I'd have liked simply to write: 'I must see you again, for I've changed, and I really think I love you.' How glad I am I waited! First because it was probably not yet true that I loved you. It hurt me all over, like the beginning of grippe. I didn't know what it was, and I complained to Petite-Chose of having chills and fever, and I asked the dresser for stomach and headache pills. I didn't understand, you see. Even your present I didn't understand, and I kept looking at it as though it had done something to me. I shook it; I got angry with it: 'Does that Lieutenant in Blue think I'll wait around for him, just on account of a powder box?' Oh! all sorts of stupidities and misunderstandings. I can't say things well, like you. There are so many fine and delicate things that I will never be able to say, but as Petite-Chose tells me, 'When you keep quiet you don't make mistakes.' I'm counting a lot on my power of keeping still, when you are here, near me. I'm turning myself up-

side down for you now, like a basket, to show that the bottom is as solid as the top. For the last two months I've been full of new thoughts which were so sweet and so troublesome that I couldn't find words to reach up to them.

"A little while ago I thought I couldn't write you any more, and now I feel as though this letter would never be able to hold all that seems to me so important and so upsetting! For instance, I've just remembered you've never seen me in street clothes! That's terrible. What shall I do? And then you've never told me whether you like small hats, and those are the only ones I wear. I don't wear my skirts very short, you know, and I wear quiet colors in the street; first because it's war time, and also because it's a rest; I have to wear all the colors of the rainbow on the stage. I wear navy blue, dark green, white and black. I don't put rouge on my cheeks in the daytime. I wear my hair close to my head and let my ears show because they are very small.

"What else is there? You've seen almost all the rest, and I'm sorry now. There is

nothing really ugly on my body except perhaps my toes a little, because of the shoes that are in fashion nowadays. And also a scar (an accident with a hat pin) on the back of my neck, where my hair begins. But as I shall not lower my head in front of you, unless I'm ashamed or unhappy, it will depend only on us two to keep you from seeing it.

"I don't quite know what is going to happen to us. I don't even know whether anything will happen. . . . Oh! I hope it will! We are very young, very susceptible to everything. But before getting to know you completely, and even if you forget me soon, I want to say thank you with all my heart. Perhaps before long I shall have in front of me, in my mirror, a Mitsou radiant with joy. Perhaps it will be a Mitsou in tears. But in any case, it will not be the Mitsou who lived before you came along—that stupid, reasonable girl who never laughed and never cried; that poor thing, who hadn't even a sorrow all her own. So I am obliged to you for the rest of my life, my dear, dear Lieutenant in Blue, since you

could hardly do less than give something to her who had nothing.

"Your
Mitsou."

V

Mitsou's apartment. She is waiting for him. He must have been in Paris since noon, but he has his family to see. He has promised Mitsou to come for tea, and she is waiting. Yesterday she bought an English tea table, some port wine, three lace aprons for the maid, one hundred and twenty-five francs' worth of perfume, and a hat. Also she stood fidgeting for two hours at the final

fitting of two new dresses. This morning she bought a great quantity of flowers and fruit.

Five o'clock. The new perfumes glow like whiskey and green chartreuse in their bottles on the dressing table; the cherry cordial, the port, and the brandy on the tea table, look like amber toilet water and the liquid rouge which Mitsou uses for painting her lips and the tip of her tongue. The flowers droop in the heat. A ray of light from the slowly moving sun touches a bowl of cherries, then casts a circle of gold on the table cloth, and finally falls upon Mitsou's shoulder as she sits in an armchair, waiting.

MITSOU, *jumping up:* "It's five o'clock. (*The sound of her voice frightens her, so she repeats more softly:*) "It's five o'clock."

She opens an illustrated magazine, but quickly closes it because she sees that the pages are trembling in her hands. She tries to walk the length and breadth of the boudoir, but there is neither length nor breadth in the boudoir, so she takes refuge at the window, under the filet lace shade, and

decides that she has found the place to wait, until . . . until the sound of wheels, until the noise of a horn, the banging of a taxi door, the ringing of the door-bell. . . .

She is wearing a black satin dress, embroidered at the neck in emerald green. It has short sleeves; sleeves that stop, as Petite-Chose says, at the "skinny" part of the arm. Mitsou is not very pretty today. And yet her pale face without make-up, her long heavy eyelashes, her smooth hair and the out-of-date but distinguished curve of her swan-like neck, give her the gravity and the charm, all white and black, of a romantic heroine. But what heroine of romance ever had such a small nose?

She is thirsty, and wets her dry lips. She leans her forehead against the half-opened window, sniffing the barely stirring air. She feels as though her brain were filled with a thousand tumultuous thoughts; but in reality she is not thinking at all; she is waiting. While looking out into the street, she occasionally glances down at her little pointed shoes. From time to time a swift fear crosses the troubled emptiness of her

mind, stabs it, and dies away: "I think I have a run in my stocking. . . . I ought to have taken an aspirin tablet. . . . Supposing he can't dine with me? . . . What if I meet Pierre in the restaurant? . . . And if he wants to come back with me tonight, what shall I say? . . . I should have taken the all-black hat, instead of the black and green. . . . It's half-past five. . . . Perhaps he couldn't . . ."

Suddenly, the taxi is there. Mitsou hears a voice telling the driver to keep three francs; then two doors open and close. He stands in front of her and . . . he doesn't recognize her. He had tried a hundred times to picture her against a sky ripped vividly open by flashes of light; against a moonless night; on a wall of clay; in checkered dreams; but he could not visualize Mitsou in street clothes, in pyjamas, or in a dressing gown. After all, he'd seen her only once, scantily clad in tulle and crimson stockings. He is surprised and embarrassed; he had expected to cry "Mitsou," and to open his arms and close them again over crumpled tulle and naked flesh. Neverthe-

less, the pale girl who stands holding out her hand seems to him pretty and touching.

Mitsou recognizes everything about him instantly. She smiles, simply from the pleasure of discovering that her Lieutenant in Blue has not such dark hair as she had thought; deep chestnut it is, almost auburn at the neck. Then she says exactly what she should say:

MITSOU: "How beautiful you are!"

He smiles and kisses the little hand which she holds out; then he blushes, not daring to kiss her cheek. Mitsou had not expected to be kissed. She sits down, points to a chair opposite her, and speaks:

MITSOU: "Did you have a good trip back?"

LIEUTENANT IN BLUE: "Very good. Very slow, of course." (*Silence.*)

MITSOU: "Would you like a little port wine?"

LIEUTENANT IN BLUE: "Yes, if you will drink with me."

MITSOU, *filling two glasses:* "Will you have a cigarette? They are there, near you."

LIEUTENANT IN BLUE: "Yes, if you'll smoke one too."

She lights a cigarette and blows the smoke far out into the room.

They both drink. She puts her glass down with a trembling hand, and the stem of the crystal tulip breaks.

MITSOU, *as though the ceiling had fallen:* "Oh!"

LIEUTENANT IN BLUE, *standing up:* "Ah! I was waiting for that word." (*He takes Mitsou in his arms and kisses her blindly.*)

MITSOU, *as soon as he lets her go:* "It's white glass."

LIEUTENANT IN BLUE: "What do you mean?"

MITSOU, *breathing fast:* "It brings good luck (*going back to his arms*). Kiss me some more, please. While you're kissing me I don't have to be afraid, anyhow."

LIEUTENANT IN BLUE: "I'm doing it to reassure you."

He reassures her. The small icy hands become warm and relaxed, the thin body that he holds close, yields to him and seems to lose all semblance of life. Mitsou's eyes are

closed, but the Lieutenant in Blue with eyes wide open sees first, close to him, her long convex eyelids fringed with black, above them her uncovered forehead, and beyond that a mantelpiece covered with ornaments.

LIEUTENANT IN BLUE, *sotto voce:* "If I get a minute alone, I see a statue up there that will be destroyed by no other hand than mine. . . ."

MITSOU, *out of breath:* "Ah. . . . (*Very softly, with great caution:*) Robert."

He is as pleased as though she had given him a present. She has never before called him Robert.

ROBERT, *softly:* "Yes, Mitsou."

The whispering puts them at their ease, for they are not yet used to the sound of each other's voices.

MITSOU: "So you're really here!"

ROBERT: . . . .

MITSOU: "Are you going to dine with me?"

ROBERT: . . . .

MITSOU: "But not here."

ROBERT, *brought back to earth:* "Why not here?"

MITSOU, *embarrassed:* "Why, because . . .

(*He starts to frown, and she hastily lies*) because the meals here aren't good enough for you; they're awfully sketchy."

ROBERT, *scandalized:* "Oh! Mitsou! don't you like good food?"

MITSOU: "Oh! Yes, I do."

ROBERT: "What shall we eat tonight? Come and sit in my lap and give me your order. Will you have lobster à l'indienne or chicken with mushrooms?"

MITSOU, *making a face:* "No, I'd like some cold salmon with a lot of mayonnaise. And then perhaps some sweetbreads—I don't care much. The trouble is that we've got to dine early, because of the Revue."

ROBERT: "Is it still the same Revue?"

MITSOU: "No, there's been a new one on since Friday."

ROBERT: "Have you got good parts?"

MITSOU: "I should say so! I do the 'Hootchy Kootchy' dance, 'Liberty lighting the world,' without tights, and the 'Girl of the XVIth'."

ROBERT: "Of the XVIth century?"

MITSOU: "No, of the XVIth district, the one near the American camp at Auteuil, and she's—well, you can imagine what she does."

ROBERT, *lost in thought:* "People do strange things."

Silence. He forgets to kiss Mitsou and looks around the room. The "surgical" dressing table fascinates him. He wants to ask her sympathetically, "How in the world did that get in here? for he can hardly believe that she herself is responsible for such a thing.

MITSOU: "It's original, isn't it?"

ROBERT: "What, Mitsou?"

MITSOU: "My dressing table. A young artist designed it. He did just that one, and then he died."

ROBERT: "Very late."

MITSOU: "How do you mean, very late? I don't think he was thirty."

ROBERT: "No, I made a mistake. I should have said: too late."

MITSOU, *all innocence:* "But on the contrary, I was just explaining to you. . . ."

ROBERT: "Don't explain anything, my love."

MITSOU, *impulsively:* "Oh! I'm so glad to have you in my house! You know this *is* my house! Have you seen my glass cabinet? Don't you like my damask armchair? Jump up and down on the springs! . . . And the engravings, they're old as old. There are none any older! Have you looked?"

ROBERT, *to himself, very gently:* "Yes, I see. Obviously everything will have to be burned."

MITSOU: "Everything burned?"

She looks at him, and he drops the subject. Her way of dealing with irony, which she doesn't understand, is to keep quiet and open her large patient eyes until the ends of her eyelashes meet her eyebrows.

ROBERT, *touched:* "Mitsou darling!"

He takes her in his arms and feels at this moment a great tenderness for her because he has come so near to hurting her.

MITSOU, *languidly:* "Well . . . and now, what shall we do?"

He hadn't expected this question. But in

answer to it, his hands leave Mitsou's shoulders, and move down the length of her arms, and on down her thighs, with so firm a pressure that instead of caressing her responsive young body they seem rather to mould it, to re-create it.

MITSOU, *coming to herself:* "No, oh! no. . . . I said that . . . because it's getting late."

ROBERT: "I am dining with you, Mitsou, if you will do me the honor."

MITSOU, *very seriously and quite simply:* "The honor would be for me."

He lowers his eyes and blushes a little under his sunburn, as he does each time Mitsou effortlessly surpasses his expectations.

ROBERT: "I'll take you to your theatre . . . which is really a music-hall. . . ."

MITSOU, *anxiously:* "Yes."

ROBERT: "And then . . . (*She is silent.*) and then I will bring you back . . . to your door . . . (*Mitsou's eyes become very bright and liquid, and he quickly continues, filled with a pity that is tinged with cruelty*) to your door, Mitsou, and at that moment I will tell

you a secret: my mother's butler sleeps very soundly and I might have to spend the night on the doorstep if . . ."

He stops. Neither of them smiles, and Mitsou does not lower her eyes. Her look has so little in it of a woman in love; it contains so much decision, so much fatalism and so little hope, that his young heart is once more filled with pity and a kind of respect. He tries to match Mitsou's simplicity:

ROBERT: "Mitsou, do you really want me?"

MITSOU: "Oh yes! It would give me great pleasure."

Again he is all admiration for the freshness she gives this well-worn phrase, uttered in an almost reverential voice, and for her discretion in not implying that they are embarked on a love affair.

VI

Lavoie's Restaurant. As it is only a quarter-past seven and several tables are empty, Mitsou and her lieutenant are put in the left-hand corner, the best part of the restaurant, and are treated with deference by the head waiter. It is still broad daylight and the stifling air of the restaurant smells of melons and strawberries. Robert gazes with delight at the heavy golden haze

of early evening, which tinges the sky behind the Madeleine a delicate green.

A WAITER, *twelve years old and feeling the importance of his years:* "Your bread tickets, please."

ROBERT: "Wait a minute, Mitsou, I have some."

MITSOU: "So have I; and extra ones because I've got a certificate for night work. Give him two, that's plenty."

ROBERT: "But I'm hungry, Mitsou! Here, young man." (*The solemn youth goes off.*)

MITSOU: "Are you alright? Wouldn't you rather sit in my corner?"

ROBERT: "I'm alright, Mitsou."

He looks about him, with the slightly false assurance of a man about town of twenty-four, and assumes an aggressive manner which is intended to be a warning to the other diners not to stare at Mitsou, and also to convey to them the fact that he is quite used to her, even blasé about her. Having imparted this information to two drab deputies, two ladies of the American Red Cross, and four tanned and loquacious

superior officers, he finally decides to enjoy Mitsou who is now dining with him in a restaurant, in her black and emerald green hat, and her black satin cape which has slipped off her shoulders, revealing her long, white neck.

ROBERT: "How well you look in black, Mitsou!"

And at the same time he asks himself: "Why is it that Mitsou, who has on no make-up, whose hair is brushed straight back above her ears, whose gestures are few, and whose voice is low—why is it that one could never call her a lady?" This problem is so absorbing that he doesn't notice the head waiter standing by the table, with an expression on his heavy Roman countenance which says: "My time is precious, but it can be wasted ungrudgingly for the country's good."

MITSOU, *flattered by Robert's contemplation of her:* "Robert . . ."

ROBERT: "Oh! Yes . . . Mitsou, wouldn't you like some lobster? I haven't had any for four months. Lobster à l'indienne?"

MITSOU: "Yes, I would. With lots of mayonnaise and all the claws."

HEAD WAITER, *gazing beyond the limits of this sad world:* "Mayonnaise does not come with lobster à l'indienne. There is curried rice with it."

MITSOU: "Oh! Never mind. They can bring me some mayonnaise on the side."

ROBERT: "Don't forget the mayonnaise. Chicken with mushrooms. . . . Oh! What luck, they have it. . . . Mitsou, do you like chicken?"

MITSOU: "I do indeed, if there's salad with it."

HEAD WAITER: "Salad does not go with chicken and mushrooms; it has a cream sauce and . . ."

MITSOU: "That doesn't matter. You can make me a salad separately."

HEAD WAITER: "Strawberries, raspberries, frozen cherries, bananas, compote of fruit?"

MITSOU, *quickly:* "Frozen cherries, frozen cherries!"

ROBERT: "But they aren't good that way, Mitsou! There's no flavor left!"

MITSOU: "I know, but it's an amusing idea."

ROBERT: "Cherries for Madame, and I'll have small strawberries (*greedily*) with plenty of thick cream. Send me the wine man. Mitsou, burgundy, bordeaux, or champagne?"

MITSOU: "It doesn't matter. I don't choose wines by their countries."

ROBERT: "They have a very excellent bordeaux here I believe, which when it is poured out, has a slight aroma of coffee and violets."

MITSOU, *horrified:* "No! Do they allow that sort of thing here?"

ROBERT: "And burgundy won't do, because it doesn't go at all with lobster and it's too heavy for chicken."

MITSOU: "Does burgundy fizz?"

ROBERT: "If one makes it, but then. . . . I can see that we shall end with champagne."

MITSOU: "Yes! Oh yes! A champagne without any taste!" (*The wine man loses interest in the conversation.*)

ROBERT, *horrified:* "Without any taste!!!

But Mitsou, where were you brought up?"

MITSOU, *vexed because of the wine man's presence:* "Not behind a bar, anyhow."

ROBERT, *to the wine man:* "A bottle of number 42. Mineral water, Mitsou?"

MITSOU: "Yes—a fizzy one."

They wait for the lobster. People, mostly Americans, come in and sit down at the vacant tables. Blond officers with cheeks like winter apples bestow all their admiration upon Mitsou, which means that now and then they put down their half-emptied glasses and look at her open-mouthed, forgetting to drink. Robert frowns in order to conceal a proprietary satisfaction. Mitsou compares him with the other men there, deciding that he is the best of them all, and she is not far from being right; her lover belongs to a type that is dark and finely made. His hands are thin and the movement of the small bones is easily seen beneath a delicate skin. His untrimmed moustache hides a short upper lip which imperceptibly pulls down the tip of his nose when he speaks. And his eyes—very large for a man, Mitsou

thinks—have a quality of mystery in their depths.

They are very young, these two, and very serious, and having had as yet nothing to drink, they remain silent. Then the champagne arrives, before the lobster. Mitsou sips the foam with blinking eyes, while Robert tosses off his glass at one gulp.

MITSOU, *laughing:* "That's better than red ink."

He makes no response to this unquestionable truth except a nod of his head. "Now I know that Mitsou is much prettier when she's sad than when she laughs. I ought to tell her stories that are sentimental and melancholy, but I never could. Why not, I wonder? I wrote her with great freedom, and yet. . . ." He begins to wonder whether he wants to become Mitsou's lover tonight. . . . "What a brute I am," he says to himself, at the very moment when there is no brutish joviality or greed in him.

MITSOU, *to the head waiter who serves her:* "Enough, thanks."

ROBERT, *protesting:* "But you only have one small claw!"

MITSOU, *very refined:* "I may take some more later, but you know I don't care much for these exotic creatures."

ROBERT, *laughing in spite of himself:* "I'm willing to wager you've never seen the sea, Mitsou."

MITSOU: "Yes, at Deauville. I was awfully bored."

ROBERT: "I can understand that."

MITSOU: "Can you? I'm glad to hear you say so. I didn't understand it at all."

ROBERT: "What?"

MITSOU: "Deauville. It's true that I just motored through, and was there only two days. But I don't see why everybody stayed outdoors the way they did all day long. I can understand their going to the casino or to a tea room, but all those people outdoors as if they had no homes. . . ."

ROBERT: "But what about the fresh air, Mitsou! And the sea! The wild waves of Deauville!"

MITSOU, *shaking her head:* "No, it doesn't appeal to me. I don't like the country. (*Looking at him.*) Perhaps with you.

. . . I'll go to the *Cabane Bambou* with you, if you like. . . ."

ROBERT, *disarmed, and pleased:* "Mitsou darling! We'll go to the *Cabane Bambou.* But not by motor, for I haven't got one."

MITSOU: "Neither have I."

ROBERT: "But . . ."

MITSOU: "Oh! That isn't mine, the one you saw. It belongs to Pierre. He has to have it for his business."

ROBERT, *coldly:* "Oh!"

MITSOU, *quietly continuing:* "He has such a lot of business, fortunately."

ROBERT, *nervously:* "Can't you find any other reason for congratulating me?"

MITSOU, *innocently:* "Are congratulations the same as condolences?"

ROBERT, *who doesn't want to laugh:* "No, Mitsou; and don't talk to me about that . . . that person. Can't you see? It's elementary?"

MITSOU, *who has managed to drink three glasses of champagne:* "How touchy you are! And yet tomorrow morning, even if you aren't pleased with me to-

night, I will have given you something that I've never given to anyone."

ROBERT: ". . . ?"

MITSOU: "No, not what you think—only love. It's not a complicated story: it's just that I've never been in love before, and now I am. The person in question is not in a very enviable position, and there's nothing at all elementary in my relations with him."

He kisses her hand, and keeps her long delicate fingers in his own. They return his pressure eagerly and trustfully—and he is suddenly assailed by the absurd hallucination that he is reading and re-reading out there at the front by a beam of light which penetrates the earthen walls of his dugout, the words that Mitsou has just spoken: "I have never been in love before, and now I am." She would probably have mispelled some words and how he loved her misspellings. A little jerk from the hand that he holds, brings him back. "What on earth is the matter with me?" he asks himself. "God forgive me, but I do believe I forgot that Mitsou is actually here, beside me."

(*Aloud.*) "Waiter, another bottle of champagne, please."

MITSOU: "Another bottle? But you'll be drunk! (*She bursts into nervous laughter*): "I'm hot, awfully hot! What about going?"

ROBERT: "Going? But we couldn't leave the chicken and mushrooms! Here it comes."

MITSOU: "Why 'here it comes!' is a sentence in one of my parts in the next revue!"

ROBERT: "It sounds like something very special."

The waiter serves them; Mitsou eats very little and Robert less than he had expected. Their conversation lags and is soon no more than occasional exclamations, pressure of the hands, and smiles of false complicity. But frequent outbursts of laughter hide the futility of their discourse, and to the people at the adjoining tables they give the impression of a pair of lovers who are enjoying themselves hugely. In spite of the champagne and the good food, Robert begins to despair. He takes Mitsou's knees between his boots, and she submits to this embrace,

but still he does not desire her. His one wish is to get away; to see stretching in front of him a deserted street at sunset, or perhaps a wide avenue overgrown with new young grass, or even a country road whose edges have been obliterated by the passing of army trucks and artillery. Mitsou holds so small a place in these visions that it frightens him. He tries to find an incitement to desire and jealousy in the faces of the admiring Americans. He summons up the picture of Mitsou half naked in strawberry stockings, but in vain. It gives him no pleasure to find that Mitsou under excitement has the lustre of a pearl, that wine does not make her flush, and that the nostrils of her tiny nose remain always white and transparent. Without interest or annoyance he listens to her recounting of certain homely axioms traditional in her family:

"Leaves from the mallow plant cure drunkenness, my mother always told me. If you let a man take two steps alone, he'll blunder three times, she used to say; and she also taught me never to take offense at the insults of people beneath you."

Robert indulges in dreary self-examination. If he dared, he would throw down his napkin and a bank-note, light a cigarette and say goodbye. Presently to his unspeakable relief, Mitsou asks what time it is, and he cheats by five minutes.

MITSOU: "Already? But darling, I must go to the *Empyrée*. Oh dear! . . . What a shame! And my head is going round and round."

ROBERT: "Waiter, the bill, please! Here's the coatroom check. . . ." (*He gets up too soon.*)

MITSOU, *sweetly:* "Where are you going? Have you got a pain in your stomach? It's upstairs, that way."

ROBERT, *gasping:* "Pain in my. . . . You're mad, Mitsou!"

MITSOU: "Why? Don't you ever have a pain in your stomach?"

ROBERT, *trying to stop the conversation:* "The Queen of Spain has no legs, Madame!"

MITSOU: "That's news. And aren't the Spaniards disgusted at having a Queen who's a cripple. . . . Have I got my

gloves? Yes, I have got my gloves. Have I got my bag? No, I haven't got my bag."

Robert, decidedly tipsy, but steadied by the amount of attention which is centred on Mitsou, hums a tune as they walk towards the door of the restaurant. All eyes are upon them. Mitsou, struggling against her dizziness, assumes an air of dignified disdain, and Robert affects an easy grace which suits him about as well as a dress with a train.

They go out. The Madeleine looks pink in the late spring twilight. Faded narcissi and evening papers are being sold by small children on the pavement, and but for the fact that the flowers cost twenty cents a bunch instead of five, it might be peace time. Mitsou shivers. Robert stretches himself and breathes deeply, glad to be in the open again.

DOORMAN, *to Robert:* "Taxi, sir?"

MITSOU: "Yes and hurry!"

She leans on Robert's arm, and the two doorman's assistants abandon themselves to their twilight hunt which consists in scaring up at both ends of the rue Royale all the

game they can find in the way of itinerant taxis. They dart here and there with unearthly agility, leaping occasionally onto the running board of one and then leaving it for better prey. Finally a captured taxi draws up and stops close to the pavement.

ROBERT, *to the chauffeur:* "To the *Empyrée-Montmartre.*"

CHAUFFEUR, *angrily:* "And is that all?"

ROBERT, *with the cold assurance of a well-bred man:* "You go where you're told. Get in, Mitsou."

MITSOU, *to the chauffeur who starts to answer back:* "Of course, that's all! Do you think I could look at you any longer than that?"

Recognizing the accents of a "fellow citizen," the chauffeur puts in his gears without further speech. Mitsou leans her head against Robert's shoulder, and Robert's arm encircles her waist. It is their happiest moment. The fresh air, the speed, the blue-green rays of the street lamps, the alcohol that throbs in their veins, her perfume for him, and for her the new delight

of his kisses. For the first time Mitsou experiences slowly his clinging lips, his bold tongue and his straight, small teeth—one little tooth especially, sharper than the rest. Her pleasure is so acute that she draws away.

MITSOU, *head back, eyes closed:* "Ah! I wonder where you bit me."

He presses her back against the discolored cloth and shaky hood of the taxi—and exults in feeling, at last, normally impatient, full of desire. He doesn't forget her name, however.

ROBERT, *softly:* "Mitsou."

MITSOU, *weakly:* "Yes. But how do you expect. . . . We're almost there. Let me go! Let me go, I tell you! You can see I haven't the courage to stop your doing what you like."

He neither hears nor obeys, and the taxi stops in front of one of those lugubrious rows of purple lights, which mark for the passerby the entrance to a place of amusement.

MITSOU, *swaying:* "Are you coming?"

ROBERT: "Where?"

MITSOU, *pointing to the stage entrance:* "In here, to wait till I'm through?"

ROBERT, *irritated and grasping:* "No, come with me."

MITSOU, *distressed:* "But I can't! What about my contract? Would you like to have the key?"

ROBERT: "What key?"

MITSOU: "To my apartment, of course. You can go to bed and wait for me."

ROBERT, *shocked:* "No."

MITSOU, *more and more distressed:* "But what will you do?"

ROBERT: "Oh, take a walk, wait outside . . . go to a movie."

MITSOU: "But why don't you want to watch me on the stage?"

ROBERT: "I don't know. I don't like seeing you on the stage any more."

MITSOU, *upset:* "Just when I have such pretty costumes, and a very serious song called 'The Ivy on the Battlefields,' with a girdle of ivy berries and a crown to match."

ROBERT, *bursting into laughter:* "God! That's funny!"

MITSOU, *dismayed:* "Robert! What's the matter?"

ROBERT: "Nothing. I was thinking about the people who believe that ivy grows on a battlefield. Don't be angry, darling. In two hours I'll be waiting here for you with a taxi."

MITSOU, *awkwardly:* "There's no need of a taxi. I'll have the motor!"

ROBERT, *interrupting:* Give it away, Mitsou, or go home in it alone. I shall have a taxi."

He takes off his officer's cap, kisses her hand as though she were not offering him her mouth, and watches her go. She runs off with her head thrust forward like a little shop girl hurrying to work. And if she doesn't look back, it is because she is afraid of seeing a discontented ungracious man under the sad purple lights whose mouth shines wet and crimson from the last biting kiss.

VII

Mitsou's apartment. She comes in, followed by Robert blinking under the glare of the lights. There is a look of hostility and mistrust on his face as he enters the room and suspiciously avoids contact with the furniture. Mitsou turns and looks at him; she threw herself so madly into the taxi in which he waited for her, and the trip seemed so short (a few kisses, a few

commonplace remarks: Many people tonight? Not too tired? What on earth did you do for two hours all by yourself? etc., etc.) that she hasn't had time to find out whether he is 'still angry' as she childishly expresses it. He is not angry, but simply on his guard. His eye is on all those unknown doors, and on the Merovingian lamp; in fact it is absorbing the details of the room, whose commonplace luxury: festoons, quilting, heavy lace, thick carpet, give it a provincial atmosphere. The resplendent double bed has rather coarse linen sheets, pale blue bows on the pillow cases, and a stitched sky-blue silk counterpane—a capacious bed, intended for sleep and for creating a family. "If I go near that bed, I'm lost," Robert says to himself, for he has just realized that he is drunk with sleep.

MITSOU: "We can talk quietly now, darling, there's no one else here. Come and let me show you around! Here's the bathroom. I'll start a bath going, right away. (*He listens to the sound of running water, and smiles with relief.*

He had a bath that morning, but is willing to take one every hour if it's offered him.) Here is the boudoir; that's the hall, and the toilet is over there. Come and I'll show you how to turn on the light."

ROBERT, *with masculine shyness:* "Don't bother, Mitsou. I'll find it without any trouble."

MITSOU: "You think you will, and then in the middle of the night when you want to go there, you bump into everything and end by finding yourself in the kitchen. Here, you see, the switch is on the left of the door. Are you upset because I'm showing you the toilet? Good heavens! You're very difficult. You don't mind asking for a glass of water and yet you won't speak of what you have to do after you've drunk it. . . . Now this is the salon."

He follows her, casting a vague glance at the crudely striped cushions and the imitation Saxe figures; but all his thoughts are centred on the bed. He can think of

nothing but those huge pillows and the pleasure of pushing his arms up underneath them, of feeling the delicious softness of the mattress, and of the smooth white expanse of the wide sheet. Oh! to sink deep inside without further effort; and to sleep.

"Sleep?" he mutters with a jerk of consciousness. "Sleep indeed!"

Mitsou leads him back to the bedroom. Her black dress, her chastely lowered eyelids, and her long fine neck give her the appearance of a young fiancée, as she stands silent and passive before her lover. Robert is not really moved, but she makes such a charming picture that he smiles.

ROBERT: "What are you thinking about, Mitsou?"

MITSOU, *raising her eyes, demurely:* "I was thinking that I'd go and get undressed in the boudoir. The bath is ready, and it will only take me ten minutes. Then I'll run another bath for you, and . . ."

ROBERT, *eagerly, looking at the bed:* "And then we'll go to bed!"

MITSOU: "My darling!" (*She flings her*

arms about his neck, kisses him, and runs off.)

Robert stands in front of the bed. "I think," he says to himself, "I'll put my cheek, just my cheek, against that pillow while I'm waiting. . . . But if I do, when Mitsou comes back, she'll find nothing but a filthy brute snoring on the bed with his boots on."

He drops into an armchair, tries to think of Mitsou and falls instantly into the rigid sleep of a soldier, sitting bolt upright, head erect, features firm. This rigidity is accompanied by hurried dreams in which are mingled war and adolescence, both so close to him, with their memories of pools of blood, jets of flame, a country house in summer, and a flat-bottomed boat on a river in the sun. Barefoot and very small, he is fishing for tadpoles with a straw hat, when Mitsou reappears.

MITSOU, *in peach colored dressing gown, her hair falling on either side of her face, greatly moved, and very brave:* "There . . . I'm ready."

ROBERT, *delighted that she has on no pyja-*

mas: "Those are the words of a martyr, my love!"

He takes her in his arms and becomes suddenly serious because she is naked and trembling.

ROBERT: "Mitsou, please forgive the unsuitability of my clothes. May I go into the bathroom?"

MITSOU, *also serious:* "Yes, of course. The bath is ready. I think you'll find everything."

He goes off, and Mitsou timidly creeps into bed while he revels in the depth of the water and scrubs his body with brush and harsh cloth, blessing Mitsou for her care in having provided fresh soap, new linen and bath salts. She trembles a little and the pink bow on her nightgown shakes gently. She listens with respect to the impressive sounds which emanate from the bathroom, and remembers suddenly one evening the week before when Petite-Chose flung herself down the stairs at the *Empyrée* and rushed off to a rendezvous, calling back shamelessly: "Oh boy, now for some loving!" Mitsou, who feels neither like danc-

ing nor shouting, meditates for a moment, and then shakes her head: "Yes, but Petite-Chose wasn't really in love." She thinks back still farther, and with a little shame, to another day when she gave herself with frigid kindness to a Man of Means, whose love making left her unmoved. "How far off all that is, and how helpless I feel! I won't know . . . I'll seem like an old maid." She sighs, and Robert comes in without knocking, wrapped in a bath robe.

MITSOU, *sitting bolt upright:* "But I laid out some pyjamas for you on the chair at the foot of the bath tub!"

ROBERT, *in good spirits after his bath:* "Do you think I wear hand-me-downs?"

He drops the wrapper and stands naked before her, certain of the effect that he will make. But it is like pearls before swine, for Mitsou thinks that any man without a stomach is well made. She closes her eyes, turns away, and moves over to her side of the bed, saying: "You will surely catch cold."

With one bound, he reaches the bed, turns back the covers, and plunges in. He

slips his left arm under the hollow of Mitsou's back and presses the whole length of her body against his own. She gives a sharp little cry, like that of a small animal when it is crushed, and then subsides, breathing fast.

ROBERT, *triumphantly:* "Ah! . . ."

He is not quite certain whether he is triumphant because of his capture of Mitsou, or because of the linen sheets—soft, smooth, and so infinitely longed for—which soothe him from head to foot. Close to his own there is a young face with eyes very large and black in the dim light; and hair falling almost to the tip of the nose, such a tiny nose, and so convenient when kissing! There is still a faint odor of dentifrice on her breath, and her cheeks smell of violet lotion. He separates her silk-covered knees with one of his and puts his leg comfortably between her thighs. She notices that it is beautifully rounded and firm of muscle. If he dared, he would say to this unknown young woman whom he holds so close: "My dear, let us stay like this. Let us sleep if we want to, or talk a little. Or else let us

embrace quietly, fraternally. We can do more later on, if we like. Desire may easily wake us both in the night. But alas, a truce of that kind is not allowed. I must, or we fall in each other's estimation, push aside this silk nightgown, although its texture is so pleasant. I must cut short our friendly embrace, and make haste, and you must spend yourself. . . . Of course we shall be happy afterwards, as happy as children who have broken a pane of glass in order to let in the air, but who find later on, perhaps, that the glass was better than the cold air. . . . Come!" He is not content merely to think this word, but says it aloud: "Come!"

MITSOU, *vaguely alarmed:* "Where?"

ROBERT, *gently, for she is very pretty:* "Oh, my darling, I am very badly behaved! Come along with me out of this tranquillity. Let's give up playing Paul-and-Virginia. Shall we?"

MITSOU, *to whom it is a small matter, at this moment, not to understand:* "Yes."

But she closes her eyes, and her hands re-

main quietly at her sides, as chaste as her eyelids.

ROBERT, *very softly:* "Are you asleep, Mitsou?"

MITSOU, *the same:* "Yes."

She takes one swift glance at the young faun bending over her, and he smiles when he sees her half-open eye, black and white and mischievous. She laughs too, a sharp nervous laugh. At this moment their gaiety is not unlike that of two young animals, having a preliminary scuffle with the possibility of a friendly bite or kick; but each is aware of the moment of love to follow, each remembers the inescapable embrace. . . . "Come!"

His youth quickly warms goodwill into ardor; he proceeds without forethought. First her mouth, then her throat, so small that it scarcely fills his hands and so beautiful that it is worthy of all the pleasurable contemplation he bestows upon it.

MITSOU, *overcome, and ready to burst into tears:* "Oh!"

Her cry, the disconsolate curve of her mouth, and the hope that she may weep,

excite him more than he expected. Plunging through the usual preludes to love, Robert has only one demand to make of the white victim with streaming hair who lies unresisting beneath him. A moment's pause to savour the benefits he has seized, and the struggle begins, slowly, to the music of a voiceless lament, to the rhythm of two bodies swaying as though to lull and soothe the pain of a wound.

In Mitsou's room, on the lace-covered wall at the head of her bed, there is for the first time, a splendid silhouette: it is the shadow of a naked rider, with narrow hips and broad shoulders, bending over his invisible steed.

VIII

Three o'clock in the morning. Robert is asleep. Mitsou wakes, perhaps because he moves, or possibly because they forgot to put out the light. She is slightly bewildered, but remembers quickly: a young man is beside her, a young man who toward midnight made love to her, briefly and almost silently, and then fell asleep at her side, as one falls dead.

She is weary, but her mind is clear and she looks back on the delight of the night before, when she held close to her own a beautiful body which, as it warmed, became aromatic like resinous wood. It twined itself about hers with the exactitude and fidelity of a growing plant, expanding and becoming more beautiful at every moment. She is grateful to him for this, rather than for the sharp emotion he caused her, which she values less.

He is sleeping on his side, one arm folded under his head, and she feels rather guilty as she looks at him, for if he were awake, would he allow her to gaze such a long while at the veins under his white skin, and at the chestnut colored hair on his chest which makes a design like three sprays of *fleur de lys?* She sees a white scar on his shoulder, and two vaccination marks on his arm. His ribs arch visibly under his skin, and she wonders whether he hasn't grown thin during the last weeks. How has he been living and what kind of work has he been doing with clay, steel, or fire, to toughen his sensitive hands and tear his nails?

Shall she kiss this serious young man gently without waking him? No, he is moving, and she draws gently away. He is dreaming. The skin on his forehead, and at the corners of his mouth becomes animated with a kind of shadowy life which has nothing to do with the smiles and frowns of daily existence. Who, in some other world, is torturing this prisoner of dreams? To Mitsou's horror, he fights, he sighs, his bound feet feebly try to run, and he vainly tries to lift himself up. She is about to free him from his torture, when a half sob breaks the agony on his face, and he drops back again into a serene restfulness, wherein war, terror, courage, and agony have no part.

Mitsou, her hand still held out to wake him, leans over to watch the last traces of his dream leave her lover's face. One last jerk, a thin line of sweat between the brows, and he sleeps peacefully again, no longer troubled by his agitated spirit. "You could almost say he was going to leave me," she thinks. But she does not complete the distressing, if fanciful, picture of her lover disappearing into the mists of sleep.

Mitsou has no desire to sleep. She has never lain awake like this, watching the slumbers of the Man of Means. How does he sleep? She has no idea. She considers for an instant the picture of her middle-aged friend in blue silk pyjamas, but the vision makes her flesh creep, and she shuts it out of her mind, saying: "It's indecent." But another vision replaces it: that of the Man of Means seated opposite her at the lunch table, at a quarter before one. "What is to be done?" It is three o'clock in the morning. There are still nine hours ahead of her. Mechanically, she raises her head in the direction of the window where the night is paling—the instinctive gesture of all prisoners and captive animals. "What is to be done? Tell the truth?" She thinks of this first, because she is gentle and kind, a little careless and very young. Then she realizes that she will not be able to tell this truth without the consent of him who lies sleeping beside her; the secret is not all her's. His name must not be divulged to the Man of Means either boastfully, or cruelly, or in a moment of exuberance, but only when

the right moment arrives. "No," Mitsou says to herself, tossing her black hair, "I had better say nothing to Pierre. Until further developments, it will be more honest to lie. Robert can decide, and if he decides nothing, well . . ." She looks at him with apprehension. He is far away now, in those profound regions of sleep which are untroubled by dreams. "Is this man to be my life?" she asks almost in prayer. "Ah! if only he wants to be." And suddenly she sinks to a very banal heroism: "If he does want to, I shouldn't need all this. I could take a little flat; I earn seven hundred francs per month, eight hundred in the next revue; I can sell my diamond ring; I'll get a job in the movies like the one I had two years ago, and he can come to the theatre for me every night when the war is over . . ." She smiles, the swift shadow of a smile: "No. He won't come to the theatre for me. He won't wait in my dressing room. He won't talk to Petite-Chose or to Alice Weiss, while I'm on the stage. He's too proud. He's unkind. He's special."

The sparrows twitter outside. Mitsou yawns, she is tired of thinking, hungry and cold, and the gray light makes her uneasy. Lacking the courage to get up and eat a banana, some black cherries, or dry biscuits which are only a few feet away, she keeps repeating to herself that she is very miserable and that she is wide awake, but after a few moments, lying once more against Robert's indifferent back, her knees touching the backs of his, she falls asleep.

Five o'clock. Through the half-opened curtains the first blue light of day changes gradually to pink. At the sharp sound of a banging door, Robert suddenly answers "Yes!" and sits up in bed. He glances around the room, and then looks at the small bird-like head nestled in the white sheets beside him. He wakes gaily like the twenty-year-old soldier he is: refreshed, aggressive, ready to spring up, to run towards the sun, but Mitsou is still asleep. . . . "Poor little thing, she has done nothing but sleep all night long. . . . I didn't disturb her." He starts to take her in his arms, but thinks better of it, runs his fingers through

his hair, rubs his eyes, and takes a drink of tepid water from the carafe beside the bed, reproaching himself for having slept "like a middle-aged husband." Mitsou vaguely realizes that someone is moving beside her and spreads open her arms which had been hiding her face. She is pale, and the double row of lashes edging her eyelids repeats the arch of her eyebrows, like the reflection of a bridge in the water below it. Her closed mouth is very small and sad.

"How pretty she is!" he thinks. "What a pity. . . ." He is surprised to find himself on the point of speaking aloud. "What a pity that . . . what? Oh, I know. . . . I stopped wanting Mitsou when I saw her. In a few minutes I shall convince her that she is beautiful and that I am young, but it won't mean anything, and that worries me. There's a feeling of obligation between Mitsou and me which is rather uncomfortable. No great harm in her wanting me to be exceptional but I've been hoping that she would be exceptional too, and it so happens that she is. She's different from Germaine at Christmas, and Lili in March and

she's not at all like Cricri in September of last year."

He remembers several more of his experiences without regret, and at the thought of each one loyally adds: "Mitsou is better than all of them, and yet never was an adventure so unsatisfying. Is she more affectionate than accomplished in love making? It doesn't matter. Is she stupid? No one is stupid who is as sensitive as she is and who has such a faculty for knowing things intuitively. Her great fault is . . ." He carefully raises a lock of hair from Mitsou's cheek, and tries to formulate his disappointment: "Her great fault is that she makes you think about her and also makes you want to say to her: 'You're only a small-sized worry, and not important enough to be a torment to anyone."

A ray of sunshine, reflected from a window pane on the other side of the street, dances like a little golden mirror on the drawn curtains, and the young man is suddenly filled with physical impatience, a vague resentment, and a very definite desire to get away.

"I can go very easily, of course," he thinks as he looks at Mitsou, still asleep and less pale as the daylight grows. "Nothing can keep me here; she herself would let me go without bitterness or affectation. She would give me my liberty, but as I left her she would make an appeal—the hidden prayer of a proud suppliant: 'I need nothing. I've asked for nothing'."

He is afraid that whatever he does will make him seem inferior to Mitsou, so he shrugs his shoulders and says with a newly found brutality: "How agreeable all this is!"

The sight of Mitsou, who is still motionless, brings him back to a gentler mood. "How pretty she is," he says again. "But she's sure to say something stupid when she wakes up; Cricri, in September treated me to nothing but stupidities during the first hour of the morning; Lili did too, in March, and I always forgave them right away. Or else she'll bowl me over with one of those intuitive truths that are as deep and as old as the world."

The room is slowly brightening, and he

looks around him angrily. "I never expected to find that soap-like marble statue here, or that bowl hanging on chains from the ceiling, or those cupids pouring their cascade of lace upon my head. What did I hope for? A woman who was neither Lili, Cricri,—nor Mitsou. But I'm on the wrong track, I'm praising her negative virtues, instead of telling myself bluntly that she hasn't made me laugh, she hasn't moved me to tears, she hasn't soothed me, and that she hasn't rocked me in that voluptuous rhythm which enchants and stupifies. Having settled that, I can go my way, can't I, adding 'Mitsou in May' to the Lilis and Cricris of other months? No. Something in her asks of me what my age and soldier's profession exempt me from giving her: it is as though she were eager for me to help her to be like the woman I will love one day. She is somewhat like her already. But chance too soon disturbed the furrow where (alive but not yet ready to sprout) the seed of my future love was sleeping. And I have no desire to tear open any further the pod in which this love is

germinating. It's not my fault if during these last three years, I've lived a life in which every gesture has had too much importance and intensity. It is a life which exaggerates the gravity of everything, even the gravity of not being in love. It's probably because of this existence that I am here on your bed, Mitsou, weighing the pros and cons of our mutual error, instead of going off cheerfully and sending you post cards from the front. You won't die, will you, of this premature illumination of your future perfections? No. You will go slightly bruised back to your little embryonic life; and its flowering will not be brought about by me. That will be the privilege of someone more mature, someone who has patience, gaiety, and circumspection, who will be able to ignore, as I cannot, that faint after taste which follows everything you say and think. Many do not understand the existence of a young man at the front; it makes him uncertain and exalted, skeptical and resigned; he is exacting and yet destitute of everything, weighed down by bitterness and buoyed up

by a child-like faith. And they do not realize, those others, that this same after taste spoils our brief returns to our old life, to our cities, our possessions, our wives.

"At least, dear Mitsou, you've made me think of the woman I shall love. She will probably have your sweetness, and a certain pride like yours, which will enable her to endure unhappiness with discretion. And I hope she will have a big heart too, under little low breasts like yours. I flatter myself that she and I will speak the same language, and that our meeting will surprise neither one of us."

The gloomy prospect of his comparative isolation, while waiting for the ultimate Mitsou, brings his day dreaming to an end. Outside someone is washing the pavement with a hose, and the empty milk bottles tinkle like alpine goat bells. Robert makes a swift decision and bends over the sleeping Mitsou:

"Goodbye, my love," he murmurs softly, before waking her. Then he takes her in his arms and kisses her, saying gaily at the top of his voice: "Good morning, Mitsou!"

IX

The same day. Three o'clock in the afternoon.

Mitsou has had lunch with the Man of Means in her apartment, and he has not discovered any change in her. She finds that she is now capable of keeping a secret, that she can lie when it is necessary, and that she can be silent in order not to lie uselessly. And as an act of homage to her hidden love,

she finds she can make certain degrading concessions to an established habit.

The Man of Means has gone, leaving Mitsou with the comforting promise that he will not see her again until the next day at the same hour. Now that she is alone she almost gives way, for the first time, to an overwhelming desire to do something violent like smashing a vase, jumping up and down on the seat of the damask armchair, or throwing a cushion up to the ceiling, or even shouting something at the top of her lungs. The Man of Means left her half an hour earlier than usual, and Mitsou has now thirty minutes left in which to make herself ready for her lover. Robert is coming to get her at five o'clock and they will take a taxi to the Bois, driving out as far as those deserted avenues near Auteuil. When he left her this morning she was tired, and a little disappointed that he should want to go before the maid brought in breakfast; but his last embrace had been long and he had been more moved than she had expected.

"When he went, he said 'I adore you,' and

I really thought he was going to tell me he loved me."

She does not smile for the memory is too poignant, nor does her grave expression change when the door-bell rings and she realizes with a certainty which at first seems strangely akin to relief, "It's a letter. He's not coming."

MAID, *entering:* "A letter, by messenger, Madame."

MITSOU, *in a far away voice:* "Is there an answer?"

MAID: "No, Madame. It was a soldier; he's gone."

MITSOU: "Alright. Thanks."

She doesn't open the letter at once, but waits a minute because she feels strangely weak, as one does after a violent nose bleed or just before fainting. "That's funny; I think the blood has all gone out of my heart." Then she sits down by the window, opens the letter and reads:

"My dearest Mitsou. The captain whom I accompanied here on a mission, leaves tonight."

She stops to draw breath after this first

phrase, saying to herself, "I understand. It's not that he is displeased with me, or has anything else in the back of his mind." She even manages a smile to prove to herself that all is for the best, and that "*Mon Dieu, c'est la guerre.*"

"My dearest Mitsou. The captain whom I accompanied here on a mission, leaves tonight. It goes without saying, my dear, that I shall leave too. I hadn't counted on spending the evening next to his leather and cloth bound flank bulging like the lid of an old trunk. I fear, my dearest, warm, soft Mitsou, that I shall fail in my efforts to tell you just how much and just in what way I shall miss you. I cannot tell you properly, and I don't really want to tell you at all. Do you remember you treated me not so long ago as if I were your twin, your classmate? Well, your thoroughly enamored classmate, my darling, has decided not to divulge what there is in you that he most misses, or what he misses the least. One would be sufficient to swell your pride and the other to prick your rather child-like self-esteem.

"The best thing for you to do, dear Mit-

sou, as soon as you've read this letter, is to sit down at the old rosewood desk which I know to be in your boudoir, and write to me. This will mean that I won't have to wait too long for your first letter out there. Tell me quite frankly whether you were upset because of our lost afternoon, our postponed dinner, and our deferred night together. Tell me, too, which you would have chosen (if one of them had to be given up): the long drive with me, or the short night beginning late and ending early? I didn't have a chance, this time, to ask any questions save those which, with lips pressed close and the body of one interrogating the body of the other, could be answered quickly and without evasion. I have so far, outraged none of your secrets, nor have I abandoned that precious and nerve-wracking habit of waiting a long while—four days each time—for the discarding of one more of your veils, and the echo of one of your words. This verbal intercourse, retarded by the obstacles of the road, had somehow given you an air of languor and unconcern. All this was dispelled last night in your arms,

when my passion was quickened by your bold and rhythmical embraces.

"I don't know when I shall come back. I don't even know whether I shall come back. Don't be frightened, darling. I simply mean that the roads are bad and that one might break one's leg in a motor accident, that the contaminated water of the trenches is causing dysentery in my regiment. As for what you would call "the other danger," we mustn't think about that. Only you must write me, Mitsou. I must tell you that I am dying of curiosity, now that I've so deliciously crumpled them both against my breast, to compare Mitsou on paper once again with Mitsou in chiffon. And here's another idea, scarcely more tactful; if before seeing me again you should tire of me, and in a few weeks' time were to bestow your favors upon another lieutenant clad in blue and in love with Mitsou, which is the duty and inclination of lieutenants in the service of France, I hope you would remember that this deviation would entitle me to a last letter. And in that letter I would want to find Mitsou's dangerous simplicity,

her uncompromising sincerity, and her reasoning which is unanswerable because it is based on simple truth.

"I am joking, Mitsou! It's a stupid thing that one sometimes does at the end of a letter, when one really wants to complain a little and curse one's luck. I shall kiss only your hands, my dear, and for the time being, wisely and sadly thrust away from me the remembrance of your responsive body.

Your
Lieutenant in Blue."

X

Mitsou to the Lieutenant in Blue.

"I am sitting at the little desk. But I didn't sit down right away, and I didn't begin my letter without first thinking as you asked me to. That would have been hard for me, because I'm not made that way. And then, you have to give yourself time to read the letter you've received; to read it thoroughly; to smile; to wipe your eyes and

to think about it carefully. I've told you already that I cannot write quickly. And you didn't write your letter quickly either. For an officer who's under orders to leave, you took a very long time. My dearest, this is not a reproach, and don't frown so that your eyebrows meet over the top of your nose. It's not a reproach, and yet in a way it is. I wonder if I wouldn't rather have had you write, 'Am obliged to leave with captain. Love and kisses.' Like a telegram, you know. Don't be upset, please. Let me tell you all the bad things first; the rest will be nicer. So you are going away. It's dreadful; worse than that. But why do you excuse yourself on account of it? I have an idea that it's not because you are going away that you excuse yourself, but because you are leaving me. Now you will say, 'But I can't very well go away without leaving Mitsou!' Well, you could. That's hard to explain but easy to understand. My love, please get one thing into your head; it is that I love you. Oh! I'm not trying to give you a present—just the opposite. My poor boy, I love you. And I give you my permission

to say 'Here's a nice mess!' when you read this. Because a woman who's in love, even a funny little thing like me, can be unbearable, when it comes to understanding everything, to guessing. It's like electricity when the current is turned on; a moment before there was only a wire and a stupid bulb of glass, and then you have a thread of flame that lights up everything.

"The bright side for you in all this is that I know now that you can count on me. Count on me, please, for everything; count on my waiting for you, if you want me to wait; for guessing what you are ashamed to tell me; and count on me too, if you suddenly make up your mind to say 'It's all over between us.' I can show you then, that I know how to behave and that there's no need for vinegar or salts.

"I will add that if you preferred to have me in some other profession; to have me learn things, to have me change myself in some way or another, I could do anything you liked even though it was only to amuse you or to give you another subject of conversation with me.

"Don't you feel a little bit reassured, in the midst of your unhappiness, that I love you? Oh! I hope so. As for me, I have a certain consolation in my sorrow because nothing has hidden it from me, and most especially not your letter. My darling Lieutenant in Blue, it's not difficult to see that you are trying, without knowing it, to stamp out the memory of our yesterday's meeting. No one could be kinder than you when you speak of our short little correspondence. A common person would have written 'I was crazy about you before I knew you; let's forget the last twenty-four hours and begin again.' And what's the use in being well brought up, if it doesn't help you to serve on a beautiful dish the things that other people throw in your face?

" 'So that's it,' you say in reading this, 'Mitsou is angry.' Neither angry, nor broken-hearted, my dear, and I'd tell anyone that I feel more comfortable about everything now, than I did this morning. 'Do you realize,' I asked myself then, 'that there's no one to tell me what he thinks of me?' Naturally, I wasn't counting on your tell-

ing me. In your circle, they don't say to a woman, 'You're the limit'; they say, 'Would you mind waiting a minute, while I go and buy some cigarettes?' And then they leave her for good. I am not the limit, and yet I was very much afraid of never getting you back again, even in a letter.

"Now that the first bad moment is over, I can see that there's not too much damage done. 'Just think,' I tell myself, 'he writes me, he remembers me, he asks me questions, he wants to know things.' You will know everything, my love. All you have to do is to ask me. Would I have chosen the drive this afternoon, instead of the night? I won't hesitate a minute; I would have liked the night best. Darling, the night is less embarrassing, it's less intimate. I can always reach almost to your level, when I am lying naked in your arms. The frightful part is that after a while we must get up, and then I tremble in front of you. All that you wanted to find in me, and didn't, while we were together, I found in you. I'm still wondering how your skin could be so soft, and why you look so serious when you're asleep, and

why you go to bed without pyjamas. I didn't think your feet would be so small. And I thought that such a refined young man who eats in a restaurant with so much care and attention to little details, would have been very complicated in his love-making. But not at all! When I found that your one idea was to take me at once and completely, I can't tell you how happy I was. So how can you expect me not to love you?

"My dearest, the hardest thing for you would have been to keep me from loving you, and the almost impossible thing for me, is to be loved by you. I say *almost* impossible because I am made so that I never allow myself to go to the depths of misfortune, or the heights of happiness. 'Mitsou's too reasonable for her age,' my friends always say. If I wasn't reasonable, I wouldn't have done so much thinking last night when you were asleep. While you slept, my love, I renounced in advance, most of what you could give me. That was guiding the flame to save a little bit of you. Do you think I'm too humble? No, I'm not

begging. If your answer is 'Goodbye, Mitsou,' I won't die. My heart is a hard little thing that can live on sorrow. I'm rather like Gitanette whom they're always trying to console on account of a great trouble she has had; she says: 'A lot better off I'd be without my sorrow! What on earth would I do with myself if I lost it?'

"I'm stubborn enough to hope for more than the sorrow you might leave me with. You found me behind the footlights singing three verses of a song, and the ideas in my head were fewer than the verses. What you liked in me, was what you put there yourself; but whether or not you sowed the seed, it's got strong roots. Weren't you pleased when, after four months you saw me beginning to grow? The pity is that the sight of you, face to face, made me draw in all my shoots. But a woman who's obsessed by love grows very quickly. She blooms; she learns how to choose the right clothes, the right colors, so that she finally creates a perfect illusion. My love, let me try to be your illusion! It's a very great ambition, dear Lieutenant in Blue, and you haven't invited me

to take a walk which might last as long as our lives. Let's begin in the easiest way, and, if you aren't entirely discouraged, please let me have you again asleep beside me and give me once more the joy of sharing your pleasure; let me have the confidence and the affection of your body and perhaps some night very gently in the dark these things may lead me at last to what is really you.

Mitsou."